

# CINEFANTASTIQUE

July

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## MEN IN BLACK



"CONTACT"

"SPAWN"

"STEEL"

"GEORGE OF  
THE JUNGLE"

Volume 29 Number 1



THE FILMING OF "BATMAN & ROBIN"



# CINEFANTASTIQUE

## Robert Zemeckis' CONTACT

# THE REVIEW OF HORROR FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, YOUR GENRE NEWS MONTHLY

CINEFANTASTIQUE is now published each and every month, with issues jam-packed with the latest stories on the hottest films you want to see.

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And also in the same issue, the making of STEEL, the summer's next big-budget comic book adaptation. Our detailed coverage includes interviews with director Kenneth Johnson and star Shaquille O'Neil, as well as the creators of the DC comic book series. Plus previews of other summer event films including MORTAL KOMBAT II and EVENT HORIZON. Also a retrospective of Oscar-winning animated shorts, along with the usual in-depth reviews and analysis you've come to expect from CINEFANTASTIQUE, the film magazine with a sense of wonder.

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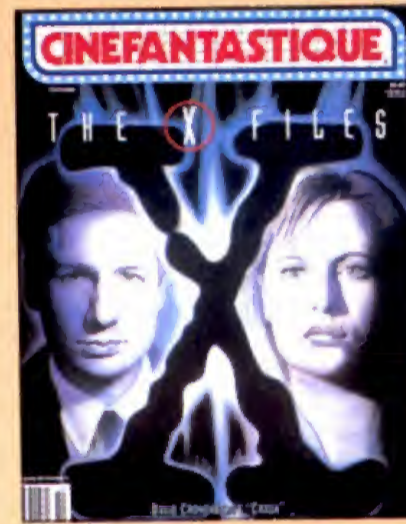
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VOLUME 29 NUMBER 1

"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

JULY 1997

The summer feast for genre fans is in full swing, and this issue highlights two of the season's most eagerly anticipated releases, **BATMAN & ROBIN** and **MEN IN BLACK**, both comic book adaptations given the big-budget, star-studded Hollywood treatment.

L.A. correspondent Craig Reid visited the sets of **BATMAN & ROBIN**, the fourth in Warner Bros.' tent-pole film franchise, introducing their third Batman, ER's George Clooney. Reid profiles producer Peter MacGregor Scott and director Joel Schumacher, the team that took over the series from Tim Burton with **BATMAN FOREVER** in 1995 and already has a fifth film in the series in preproduction. Also profiled is Chris O'Donnell whose Robin takes center stage with this installment as well as villains Uma Thurman as Poison Ivy and Arnold Schwarzenegger as Mr. Freeze. Production designer Barbara Ling talks about upgrading Gotham City and the Dark Knight's arsenal of bat-toys. And an interview with scriptwriter Akiva Goldsman rounds out the coverage and provides a peek at Goldsman's take on **LOST IN SPACE**, New Line Cinema's movie update which he is currently producing in London.

**MEN IN BLACK** doesn't have the comic book pedigree of **BATMAN**, but the Steven Spielberg production is matching its more illustrious competition star for star, monster for villain and dollar for dollar in lavish sets and special effects. Our comprehensive production story by New York writers Judd Hollander and Sue Feinberg includes interviews with director Barry Sonnenfeld (**THE ADDAMS FAMILY**) and Walter Parkes, who currently heads-up Spielberg's Dreamworks SKG movie operation. Also profiled are the CGI alien effects by ILM and comic book creator Lowell Cunningham, whose black and white Malibu Comics mini-series led to a lesson in Hollywood filmmaking. L.A. correspondent Doug Eby looks at Oscar-winning makeup artist Rick Baker's contribution to the film and interviews alien designer Carlos Huante who questions the film's decision to supplement the live latex ETs with CGI effects solutions.

Frederick S. Clarke



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**Publisher & Editor:** Frederick S. Clarke. **West Coast Editor:** Steve Biodrowski. **Bureaus:** New York/ Dan Persons, Dan Scapperotti. Los Angeles/ Douglas Eby. London/ Alan Jones. **Contributors:** Sue Feinberg, Scott Tracy Griffin, Judd Hollander, Ian Johnston, F. Colin Kingston, Mike Lyons, Anthony P. Montesano, Craig Reid, Frederick C. Szebin, James Van Hise. **Editorial Operations Manager:** Elaine Fiedler. **Editorial Production:** Lisa Tomczak-Walkington, David Bellm. **Publisher's Assistant:** Lisa Coduto. **Online Marketing and Promotion:** David Bellm. **Circulation:** Reva Patterson. **Business Manager:** Celeste Casey Clarke.

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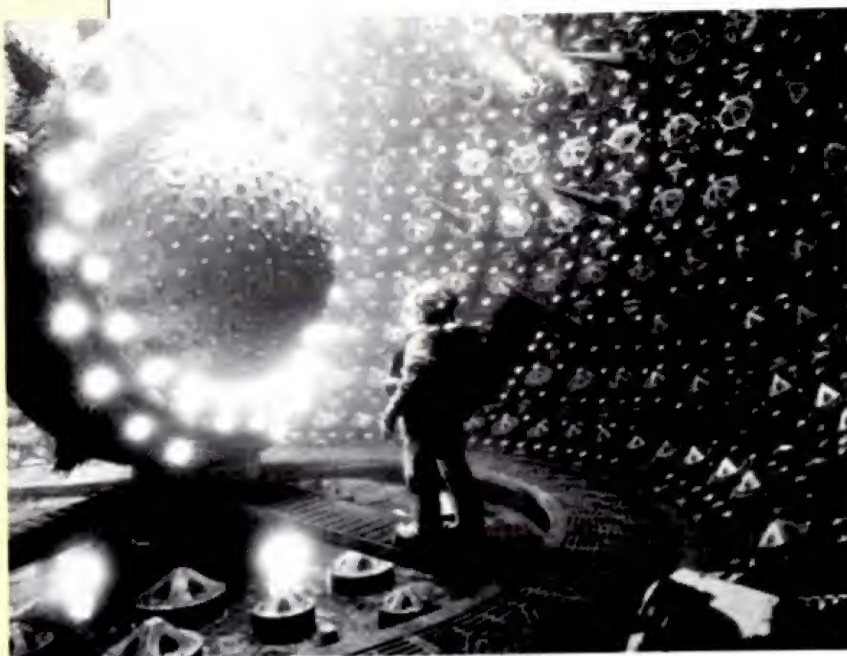
## EAGERLY AWAITED

### EVENT HORIZON (Paramount)

In the year 2046, a rescue mission is sent to the outer reaches of the solar system to salvage the Event Horizon, a prototype spaceship missing for seven years. But as the crew searches for survivors, they find themselves confronting the terrifying secrets that lie within. Laurence Fishburne, Sam Neill, Kathleen Quinlan, and Joely Richardson star for director Paul Anderson (MORTAL KOMBAT), using a script by Philip Eisner. The special effects were supervised by Richard Yuricich (BLADE RUNNER).

What attracted director Anderson to the script? "I thought it was a hugely original work," said Anderson. "And something that I hadn't seen done for a long time—a psychological horror film that reminded me of some of my favorite movies like THE EXORCIST and THE SHINING, but in a totally unique location: outer space."

August 1



we've found, dealing with myth, is that when you compare fairy tale and myth, there are similarities, but myth is on a much huger scale and deals with much bigger things, like the meaning of life. Even though we're having fun with it all, there's just this kind of 'bigness' about everything." Borrowing a style from artist Gerald Scarfe, the filmmakers have given all of this 'bigness' an exaggerated, off-kilter look and a backdrop that looks like something out of a '60s UPA cartoon. Also, continuing to mix technology with tradition, HERCULES will feature a battle sequence with a CGI multi-headed Hydra. Added to this are the voices of Danny DeVito as the cynical satyr Phil, James Woods as the schmoozing villain Hades, and actor Tate Donovan as Hercules, along with an R&B-Motown inspired soundtrack from Alan Menken and David Zippel. With all of this going for it, Disney's HERCULES will no doubt make other versions seem like, well, myths. SEE CFQ 28:12 **Mike Lyons**

### MEN IN BLACK (Columbia) July 4

Set to open after two highly anticipated sequels, THE LOST WORLD: JURASSIC PARK and BATMAN AND ROBIN, this film is being built up to be one of the big events of the Summer. The film puts a new twist on conspiracy theories, combining a large portion of dead pan humor, a 1950s feel, and some of the wildest aliens this side of the Mos Eisley cantina. Tommy Lee Jones plays MIB agent Kay, who monitors activities of illegal aliens—extraterrestrial aliens, that is. Our world has become an intergalactic hideout for fugitives, con-men, murderers, and thieves. Said co-star Will Smith, who plays a New York cop recruited to stop an intergalactic terrorist plot, "INDEPENDENCE DAY was clearly going for the drama of aliens coming in and taking over the world. This movie is more of a delicate balance. INDEPENDENCE DAY definitely takes liberties, but this movie takes a lot more comedic liberties." A recent screening was quite funny and, the film, with its low-key approach and emphasis on humor, should make for a refreshing change from films that are top-heavy with special effects. SEE PAGE 16 **Judd Hollander**

### MIMIC (Dimension) July 18

Dimension films was happy enough with the results of this science-fiction horror effort to push back a planned Spring opening in favor of competing head-to-head with the majors during the lucrative summer months. Mira Sorvino stars for director Guillermo Del Toro, making his U.S. bow after debuting with the excellent Mexican horror film CRONOS a few years back.

### ALIEN: RESURRECTION (Fox) Fall

200 years after the events of ALIEN<sup>3</sup>, a new corporation resurrects Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) from a blood sample and removes the Queen Alien embryo implanted inside her. As this clone struggles to assess her humanity, she finds that her DNA has been mixed with the alien DNA, giving her heightened abilities and a question as to how human she really is. At the same time, the group of company scientists and soldiers team up with a rough pack of mercenaries to try to stop the events unfolding around them before their ship lands on Earth and unleashes a new mutation of the Alien. The new film is being directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet (co-director of CITY OF LOST CHILDREN), who signed on after Danny Boyle (TRAINSPOTTING) bowed out. Winona Ryder plays Annalee Call, who teams with Ripley to fight the aliens. Special effects company Duboi (who worked on CITY OF LOST CHILDREN) will handle the digital work. The new film will, reportedly, be the first in the series to utilize a CGI Alien throughout. Weaver is reportedly receiving \$11 million to reprise Ripley. Ron Perlman (BEAUTY AND THE BEAST) will play Jonner, a hard-drinking tough-guy character that scripter Joss Whedon wrote with Hong Kong actor Chow Hun Fat in mind. Rumor has it that both John Hurt and Tom Skerritt were approached secretly to do cameos, portraying their characters from ALIEN in flashback sequences. Fox has postponed the hoped-for July 25 summer opening until the end of the year.

### BATMAN AND ROBIN (Warners) June 20

The fourth installment in the Warners franchise reaches screens with a new Batman (George Clooney), new villains (Arnold Schwarzenegger as Mr. Freeze and Uma Thurman as Poison Ivy), and a new helper (Alicia Silverstone as Batgirl). Chris O'Donnell, Michael Gough, and Pat Hingle return in their familiar roles: Robin, Alfred, and Commissioner Gordon. Joel Schumacher directs, from a script by Akiva Goldsman. SEE PAGE 32.

### CONTACT (Warners) July 11

Jodi Foster stars for director Robert Zemeckis in this adaptation of Carl Sagan's novel, about a group of SETI scientists who build a spaceship from specs sent by an alien intelligence via radio telescope. Foster said she considered herself "almost...a protector of Sagan's original vision." SEE PAGE 12 **Douglas Eby**

### HERCULES (Disney) June 27

Moving away from the live-action look of POCAHONTAS and HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME, the Disney studio goes "cartoony" with HERCULES. Directors John Musker and Ron Clements, who last pushed the animation envelope with 1993's ALADDIN, will no doubt rip the sides off of that same envelope with this unexpected adaptation of the titular character's battle with Hades, lord of the Underworld. "It's a bigger movie than we've ever done," said co-director Clements. "What

# RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson  
(unless otherwise noted)



## MORE COMBAT

### MORTAL KOMBAT: ANNIHILATION (New Line)

Ironically, this sequel to director Paul Anderson's sleeper hit is set to open the same day as his next film, EVENT HORIZON. This time out, Liu Kang, Kitana, Sonya Blade, and Johnny Blade must survive a series of spectacular challenges as they take on Shao Kahn in his bid to control Earth. Kahn has ripped open a portal in the fabric of the universe between the two dimensions and intends to merge both by sending his extermination squads to subjugate humanity: Sindel, Queen of the Living Dead, Motaro, a monstrous Centaur, and Ermac, a telekinetic Red Ninja are just three members of Kahn's army of darkness. Robin Shou, Talisa Soto, Deron McBee, super model Irina Pantava, and Lynn Red Williams star for director John Leonetti, who promises an action style inspired by Tsui Hark's Hong Kong fantasy flicks but claims the film is "not about action for action's sake. It's about a group of people and what they're going through in this awesomely mystical adventure. That's where the true excitement lies." **Alan Jones**

August 1



# HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

## ANIMATED "ANASTASIA"

*Disney defector Don Bluth tries his hand at a historical drama.*

by Mike Lyons

20th Century Fox has their hat off, and they're about to toss it into the animation ring. This year will see the debut of ANASTASIA, the first offering from the new Fox Animation Studio. The film will center on young Princess Anastasia, who was living a charmed and royal life with her family in the czar's palace in Russia, until the evil Rasputin places a curse on the family, which triggers the Russian Revolution. As her family escapes an angry mob storming the palace, Anastasia is separated from them. Ten years later, Anastasia, now an orphan with no memory of her heritage, is sent out into the harsh world, where rumors abound in St. Petersburg that the lost Princess might still be alive. This is good news to all—except Rasputin.

Directing the film is the team of Don Bluth and Gary Goldman, who have certainly had their share of ups (THE LAND BEFORE TIME) and downs (ROCK-A-DOODLE) since leaving the Disney studio almost twenty years ago. ANASTASIA will feature an impressive lineup of voice talents, including Meg Ryan as the title character; John Cusack as her love interest, Dimitri; Kelsey Grammar as his sidekick, Vladimir; Angela Lansbury as Anastasia's grandmother, Marie; Christopher Lloyd as the villain, Rasputin; and Hank Azaria as Bartok, Rasputin's droll pet bat. Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty, who wrote the score for the Broadway production of RAGTIME, will provide the music.

At a New York press presentation in March, ANASTASIA's executive producer, Maureen Donley (another former Disney employee, who worked on such projects as THE LITTLE MERMAID and TOY STORY), talked about Fox's initial inspiration for bringing such an unusual story to animation. Donley said that within this more realistic tale, they saw opportunities for the more magical elements inherent in the medium. The filmmakers were



ANASTASIA will feature some of the most realistic human character animation ever achieved. Meg Ryan voices the title character (seen at center).

also intrigued by the 20th Century setting of the film, as it would add a backdrop different from the fairytale quality of the story.

Donley then showed some impressive work-in-progress footage from the film, which featured what may be some of the most realistic human character animation ever achieved. The film will be the first Cinemascope studio animated feature since Disney's THE BLACK CAULDRON; and, judging from the footage, the filmmakers

behind ANASTASIA have taken full advantage of their wide-screen canvas (a craning opening shot of St. Petersburg and a dynamic train wreck sequence are particularly stunning).

ANASTASIA, which will hit theatres this November with a great deal of Disneyesque hype and hoopla, will be a proving ground for the three-year-old Fox Animation Studio, which has already selected the science-fiction themed PLANET ICE as its next project. □

## Short Notes

**Ian McKellen** (RICHARD III) has agreed to portray James Whale in FATHER OF FRANKENSTEIN, an account of the final days in the life of the director of FRANKENSTEIN and BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN. **Bill Condon** (CANDYMAN 2) will write and direct, from the excellent novel by Christopher Bram. Coming off the success of SCREAM, **Wes Craven** and his long-time producer **Marianne Maddalena** have signed a three-pic deal with Dimension. The first film will be SCREAM 2, again written by **Kevin Williamson**, which will start filming in June. Director **Jonathan Demme** (SILENCE OF THE LAMBS) is prepping BELOVED at Touchstone as his next effort. **Oprah Winfrey**, who also produces, will star as a slave haunted by the baby daughter she killed years before. Actor **Mark Hamill** is trying to secure a directing gig, adapting BLACK PEARL, his popular Dark Horse comic book series about a disillusioned court reporter who dons a superhero costume when she turns vigilante. Pleased with the results on MIMIC, his American directing debut, Dimension has signed **Guillermo Del Toro** (CRONOS) to helm SUPERSTITIOUS, from R.L. Stine's first adult horror novel. □

## Dream Works Animation

by Mike Lyons

Hollywood's animation juggernaut continues with Dream Works, the studio initiated in 1994 by Steven Spielberg, David Geffen, and Jeffrey Katzenberg, who currently have four animated films in the works. As head of Walt Disney Pictures, Katzenberg honed and crafted his knowledge of animation, and his first venture with Dream Works, PRINCE OF EGYPT, will be closely scrutinized and eagerly awaited. Slated for release in November of 1998, the film is an animated epic re-telling of the story of Moses. The jam-packed cast of celebrity voices includes Val Kilmer, Ralph Fiennes, Michelle Pfeiffer, Sandra Bullock, Steve Martin, Jeff Goldblum, and Patrick Stewart. The film is being directed by Steve Hickner and Simon Wells (who, respectively, served as producer and director of Amblimation's BALTO), as well as Brenda Chapman, former head of Disney's story department.

PRINCE OF EGYPT will be followed by EL DORADO: CITY OF GOLD (tentative title). Set in the year 1519, the film will center on two bumbling stable hands who stowaway on a ship to the New World and wind up discovering the fabled lost city. Voices include Kevin Kline, Kenneth Branagh, Rosie Perez, and Armand Assante. The film will be directed by David Silverman and Will Finn (a former supervising animator at Disney, who created such characters as Cogsworth the clock and Iago the parrot). Tim Rice and Elton John, who won an Oscar for their work on THE LION KING, will provide the music.

For their third animated feature, Dream Works is joining forces with the computer house Pacific Data Images for ANTS. The all-computer-generated feature will center on a mild-mannered ant who initiates a "colony wide revolt against conformity." The eclectic voice cast includes Woody Allen, Danny Glover, and Sylvester Stallone.

Dream Works' fourth animated feature, SHREK, will use the voice talents of Chris Farley, Jeanne Garafalo, and Eddie Murphy. The film is based on the children's book by William Steig about an ugly ogre trying desperately to be Prince Charming. □



# TARZAN FEST

*AMC's 32-film marathon shows the apeman's long cinematic legacy.*

by Scott Tracy Griffin

For the first time in history, Tarzan fans will get an entire uninterrupted weekend of the jungle king's many cinematic incarnations. On June 6-8, cable channel American Movie Classics (AMC) will show 32 of the 44 theatrically released Tarzan films "uncut, uninterrupted, commercial-free and without colorization."

The marathon offers a unique window into 20th century American culture as reflected in period cinema. Viewers will see Tarzan evolve from Elmo Lincoln's silent, stalwart, scowling hero of *TARZAN OF THE APES* (1918) into Mike Henry's 1960s embodiment of the ape man as a James Bond-like swinger in *TARZAN AND THE JUNGLE BOY* (1968).

The Tarzan phenomenon was launched in 1912, when budding novelist Edgar Rice Burroughs sold his third story, *Tarzan of the Apes*, to the pulp magazine *All Story*. It was an instant success; pulp sequels and hardback reprints quickly followed.

Proving that the commercial climate wasn't much different from today, the story rights were quickly optioned for a motion picture. Boasting a \$300,000 budget, *Tarzan of the Apes* was one of the



Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan in *TARZAN ESCAPES* (1936), part of AMC's weekend-long "Tarzan Adventure," starting Friday, June 6 at 8 p.m.

first films to earn over \$1-million, by offering a formula that would be recycled for the rest of the century: plenty of action, some animals, and a little romance between the incorruptible hero and a civilized belle.

The Tarzan series had sporadic silent installments until producer Irving Thalberg—in response to the surprise success of 1930 Oscar nominee *TRADER HORN*—

sought another angle to cash in on the newly-lucrative jungle genre. The result was the hit film *TARZAN, THE APE MAN* (1932), starring Olympic swimming champion Johnny Weissmuller, beginning a franchise that Hollywood would milk for decades.

AMC will launch the marathon Friday, June 6 at 8 P.M. with the debut of a new documentary, which examines the immortal jungle hero and the phenomenon of his ongoing appeal.

Next, we'll see *TARZAN AND HIS MATE*, Weissmuller's sequel to *APE MAN* (1934). This classic adventure includes the oft-censored, albeit discreet nude scenes that helped usher in the Hays Code for motion picture decency.

The remaining ten Weissmuller films air after that, followed in mixed order by five Lex Barkers, six Gordon Scotts, two Jock Mahoneys, and three Mike Henrys. Also included are Lincoln's inaugural flick and rarely seen films starring '30s-era competitors for Weissmuller's jungle throne: former Olympians Buster Crabbe, Herman Brix, and Glenn Morris.

The Tarzan film-fest will conclude with an encore presentation of Mahoney's *TARZAN'S THREE CHALLENGES* airing at 4 A.M. Monday, July 9. □

## Obituaries

by Jay Stevenson

### Alexander Salkind

The producer of *SUPERMAN* (1978) died of leukemia on March 8, in Paris. Although his birth date is sometimes listed as 1915 (he added years early in his career), he was believed to be 75 or 76. The three *SUPERMAN* films that he and his son Ilya produced (a fourth was made without them) totaled over \$1-billion in worldwide grosses. Although of varying quality, they brought the Man of Steel up to date in the era of *STAR WARS*, with elaborate special effects and production values, coupled with a charming interpretation by Christopher Reeve. □

## Production Starts



### THE POSTMAN

Kevin Costner stars in and directs this post-apocalyptic sci-fi film—his first directing effort since the Oscar-winning *DANCES WITH WOLVES*. Eric Roth (*FORREST GUMP*) and Brian Koppelman wrote the script.

### SPHERE

After several months' delay, for R&D to get the special effects costs down, this adaptation of Michael Crichton's novel finally goes before the cameras. Dustin Hoffman, Sharon Stone, Samuel L. Jackson, and Peter Coyote star for director Barry Levinson, who previously scored with his Crichton-based *DISCLOSURE*. Screenwriters Stephen Hauser and Paul Attanasio adapted the novel, which features some memorable sequences with a giant squid that should erase any bad memories of *THE BEAST*.

### TOMORROW NEVER DIES

The latest 007 adventure (code named *BOND 18* during preproduction) began shooting in April, at the new Eon Productions facility northwest of London, and at Pinewood Studios. The pre-title sequence had already been completed, in the French Pyrenees, centered around one of the few operational high-altitude airfields in Europe. Further location work will take place in the U.K., Europe, Southeast Asia, Mexico, and off the coast of Florida. Pierce Brosnan is back as Bond—James Bond—with *SUPERCOP*'s martial arts star Michele Yeoh (aka Kahn) as his female ally. Jonathan Pryce plays the British Baddie, a multi-media tycoon whose global empire empowers him to direct the outcome of world events to further his own ends.

## OSCARS SNUB GENRE

The 69th Annual Academy Awards almost entirely shut out science-fiction, fantasy, and horror films from the winner's circle. As usual, the major awards went to mainstream fare, while only technical categories went to genre films. The winners were **Volker Engel**, **Douglas Smith**, **Clay Pinney**, and **Joseph Viskocil** for the Special Effects of *INDEPENDENCE DAY*, along with **Rick Baker** and **David Leroy Anderson** for Eddie Murphy's multiple makeups in *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*. It was Baker's fourth win in the category. The only other genre nominations were: *TWISTER* and *DRAGONHEART* (for Special Effects), *STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT* (for Makeup), and *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME*, *THE PREACHER'S WIFE*, and *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* (for Comedy or Musical Score). Several borderline genre efforts were in the running, but of those, only **Bruce Stambler** took home a statue, for the sound effects editing of *THE GHOST AND THE DARKNESS*. *ERASER* was also nominated in the category. *SPECIAL EFFECTS* lost in the Short Documentary category. **Bess Watson** was nominated for her lead role in *BREAKING THE WAVES*. Two adaptations of stage plays, with elements of the supernatural and/or horror, were nominated for Adapted Screenplay: *HAMLET* (**Kenneth Branagh**) and *THE CRUCIBLE* (**Arthur Miller**). Additionally, *HAMLET* was nominated for Costuming, Art Direction, and Dramatic Score, and **Joan Allen** was nominated for her supporting role in *THE CRUCIBLE*. □



# STEEL

## Hollywood gambles on Shaq as superhero of the 'hood.

By Colin Kingston

There is more than one super hero movie stealing into a movie theater near you this summer. STEEL, based on the DC Comics title, is scheduled to arrive August 9.

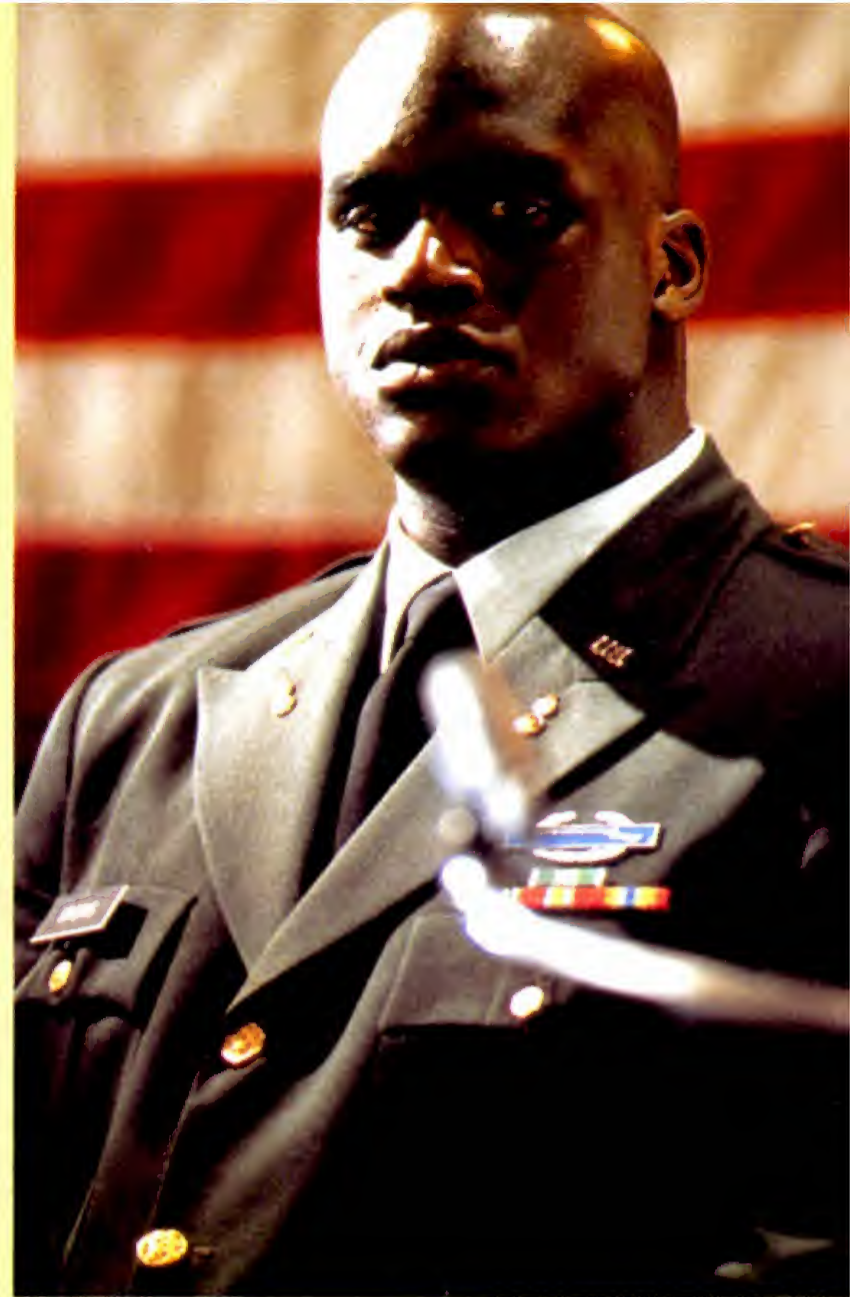
Written and directed by Kenneth Johnson (THE INCREDIBLE HULK), STEEL stars basketball superstar Shaquille O'Neal, Judd Nelson (NEW JACK CITY), Richard Roundtree (SHAFT) and Annabeth Gish (WYATT EARP).

STEEL is being produced by Quincy Jones/David Soltzman Entertainment. Johnson became involved in the project through his friendship with Joel Simon, a producer who works with Jones. "Joel has approached me a number of times in the past, as have other people, when they have a comic book premise they want turned into a television show or movie. I guess this is because of the success I had with THE INCREDIBLE HULK, which is still the longest running

Based on the DC Comic book series, Warner Bros. opens the film nationwide August 8.



Basketball superstar Shaquille O'Neal stars as Steel, a kind of "blue collar Batman."



show of its kind ever on network television."

Working with Jones has been a pleasurable experience. "Quincy has been wonderfully sort of hands-off throughout the whole process. He has had a couple of meetings and given me a few notes here and there but for the most part I think one of his greatest strengths is in hiring people he likes and trusts and letting them do their thing."

As with most comic book adaptations, the theatrical version of STEEL is slightly different. Said Johnson, "In the comic book, weapons are ballistic and blow bloody holes in people. That was not something I was interested in doing. But then I came up with the notion of creating a new generation of weaponry that employs sonic energy that can blow over a building or take down a line of troops without killing them."

"There is a weapons testing accident on an army base at the beginning of the picture which is caused by Nathaniel Burke (Judd Nelson), our bad guy. Sparky's (Annabeth Gish) legs are crushed and she is rendered a paraplegic. Steel [Shaq] is disillusioned and goes home to his Los Angeles neighborhood. Steel soon sees the weapons he dealt with in the military turning up on the street. Realizing that the police are outgunned, he takes matters into his own hands because he feels partly responsible for their creation. He soon realizes that Nathaniel plans to demonstrate these weapons to get buyers from around the world who traffic in this sort of thing—such as the Colombian drug cartels, and skin head white supremacist organizations that are looking for new types of weaponry.

"Steel soon enlists the help of Sparky

[Annabeth Gish], literally carrying her in her wheelchair out of the VA Hospital and taking her to Los Angeles where she becomes part of his grassroots team to fight back. She is the electronic whiz of the group and creates lots of dazzling high tech gadgetry."

Added Johnson, "Our guy is sort of a blue collar Batman who works out of Uncle Joe's junkyard and has to piece things together as best he can." Johnson described Uncle Joe's character, played by film veteran Richard Roundtree, as "the Yoda of the film."

While some moviegoers may be leery of Shaq's acting abilities, Johnson had nothing but kind words for his 7'3" star. "I think people who are fans of the comic book will be pleased with Shaq's performance. He is a terrific guy. He is always on time. He not only knows his lines but everybody else's lines too. Although he hasn't had a whole lot of experience as an actor, he was very willing to work on each scene and to rehearse diligently to absolutely get the most out of every scene. The people at Warner Brothers are very pleased with the end result."

The film is not without its lighter moments. "There are some 230 visual effects shots in the picture and though it is an action-adventure, it is also a comedy. There is a lot of humor in it, including a running gag where Steel can never make a basket with anything, whether it is a basketball or a piece of trash he is throwing away."

Johnson is proud of the final product. "I think the audience will come away feeling like they've seen a very fun movie." □



# GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE

**Jay Ward's sly Tarzan cartoon spoof—live!**

*By Scott Tracy  
Griffin*

"George, George, George of the Jungle—watch out for that tree!" This famous refrain captured the nation's imagination in 1967 when a jut-jawed, dim-witted klutz successfully reworked the Tarzan myth in Jay Ward's inimitable style.

The cartoon shorts, crafted by the man who created Mr. Peabody, Rocky and Bullwinkle, and a host of other memorable characters, ran for four years. Like all of Ward's creations, the cartoons featured stark, stylized drawings but compensate for their visual simplicity with intelligent humor and satire, ranging from clever puns and word plays to sly political commentary.

In 1992, in response to the demands of Ward's now-adult devotees, the cartoons were rereleased on video. As a result of the resurgent interest, Ward's heirs sold the rights to the ungainly jungle hero to Walt Disney for the first feature film adaptation.

"I always loved that George was somebody who could be a complete buffoon, out of which, inadvertently, great things happened," noted producer David Hoberman, of the character's appeal. "He was one of those

comic heroes who somehow managed to maintain his integrity. It had absurdist qualities to it, as well. I always liked Jay Ward because he brought an edge to his cartoons."

Hoberman, then president of the Walt Disney motion picture group, purchased the rights, and stayed on as a producer when he left Disney to found Mandeville Films. Since Mandeville has a distribution agreement with Disney, the longtime George fan was able to continue his relationship with the property. Fellow producer Jordan Kerner, of the Avnet/Kerner Company, also counted himself among Ward's fans: "It was one of my favorite cartoons ever—it was political, it had a heart, and it was smart, as were all of Jay Ward's cartoons."

George and Leslie Mann as socialite Ursula Stanhope, finding love in the jungle.



Brendan Fraser as George, in Disney's reworking of the '60s cartoon series.

"Unlike Rocky and Bullwinkle, George lends itself to easy screen adaptation," noted Kerner, whose company joined the Disney team for the picture. "It has something to say both in the world of comedy, because George is a very funny character, and in the world of heart; this is a man who comes from a simple world into a complex world, raising the question: which values are better values?"

The film's story originated in the mind of freelance screenwriter Dana Olsen, a prolific writer credited with a number of comedies, including MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN, ENCINO MAN, THE BURBS, and NATIONAL LAMPOON'S CHRISTMAS VACATION. In July 1995, Olsen's agent submitted an original spec script ti-

tled GORILLA BOY to Walt Disney Studios.

"I thought it was a ripe area for a funny picture. I couldn't remember any recent funny, jungle, Tarzanesque pictures, and I loved those films when I was a kid," recalled Olsen of his inspiration for penning GORILLA BOY.

"The original [Weissmuller] Tarzan is one of my favorites," continued Olsen. "It's so unbelievably hilarious when viewed in perspective. There's a tremendous amount of playful sexual innuendo that's a riot. I'm a huge Jay Ward fan, so the George project just seemed like it would be great fun, and it was."

Olsen's script was easily rewritten as GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE; he maintained the story structure, while fleshing his characters into Ward's cast, and adding gags. The production encountered a few hurdles in the early stages as it struggled to find its identity. The original director, Alan Cohen, left the project because a creative consensus couldn't be reached on the picture's direction. Director Sam Weisman (D2: THE MIGHTY DUCKS) joined the crew, and Disney expanded their scope, deciding that the film would be a major summer release in 1997. According to





Rigging Fraser to swing on a jungle set built inside the huge Hughes Aircraft plant.

Kerner, when McDonald's reviewed Disney's slate of upcoming films for possible product tie-ins, George was a hands-down favorite. Other licensors, including Mattel Toys, quickly followed suit, and a host of George products will be available to coincide with the film's release.

Producers Kerner and his partner Jon Avnet were hired at this time, bringing scripter Audrey Wells (THE TRUTH ABOUT CATS AND DOGS) into the fold to do the rewrite. "Audrey brought a very contemporary style to it," said Kerner. "She brings an off-kilter, wacky, always-romantic view of relationships and this was a way for us to look at the relationships and friendships between humans and animals, as well as between humans and humans."

Wells toned down the "jungle-genre spoof" aspect and played up the romance angle between George and his mate, Ursula Stanhope. The picture retained Olsen's story structure, however.

The film's plot unspools like the standard jungle picture storyline, with humorous twists along the way. San Francisco socialite Ursula Stanhope (Leslie Mann), on a final fling before marrying her fiance, effete snob Lyle

Vandergrout (Thomas Hayden Church) drags him to Africa to seek the legendary White Ape of Ape Mountain. Their expedition is headed by Kwame (Richard Roundtree), a local guide, and a shady pair of inept crooks named Max and Thor (Greg Cruttwell and Abraham Benrubi).

After finding true love with George and whisking him away to San Francisco for the requisite "fish out of water" gags, Ursula must follow him back to Africa to rescue his "brother," Ape, from the machinations of Max and Thor. Meanwhile, Lyle plots to win Ursula back from the jungle man.

Brendan Fraser (ENCINO MAN, SCHOOL TIES) gained the role of George, and threw himself into it, working with a

SCREENWRITER DANA OLSEN

**"The original [Weissmuller] TARZAN is one of my favorites. It's unbelievably hilarious when viewed in perspective. There's a tremendous amount of sexual innuendo that's a riot."**

fitness trainer and an acrobatic coach, and carefully monitoring his diet to drop his body-fat into the single digits. Fraser, a professed fan of the hero he terms "navigationally-challenged," could quote from the cartoons, and was able to correct any mistakes the crew made regarding the character.

After Weisman joined the project, the director called Fraser into the office to inquire about his progress towards the role. Fraser, in understated grace, arrived at the studio wearing thick, layered clothes and carrying a gym bag, to assure the producers that he was taking the role seriously. As proof of his progress, he produced an album of before and after shots of his physique and capped his presentation by stripping off his shirt and doing a few curls with a pair of dumbbells from his bag. Weisman was convinced.

Fraser continued his workouts throughout filming, hitting the gym equipment between scenes. Despite his devotion to preventative medicine, he was injured on the set when he fractured his toe while play-wrestling with the ape-actors. "It was a lot more serious than it sounds," stated Weisman. Fraser gamely finished the shoot in spite of the pain.

Though the live action

George has fleshed out the six minute cartoons into a full-length feature, touches from the character's animated roots are retained. A cartoon opening sequence features the titular theme song in a modern reworking by former Grammy nominees The Presidents of the United States of America.

The film retains Ward's device of an omnipotent narrator, who interacts with the story; characters get into arguments with the narrator, who also changes the story when it suits him. Though SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE veteran Don Pardo laid the initial narrator tracks, the final casting of the role was not confirmed at press time.

Tai the elephant (THE JUNGLE BOOK, OPERATION DUMBO DROP) played Shep, George's faithful pet, a dog trapped in an elephant's body. Many physically impossible things were required of Tai, such as the ability to run and fetch like a dog. The solution was provided courtesy of DreamQuest Images' CGI, which electronically layered images over the elephant during her dog-like sequences.

The 28-year-old elephant, trained by Gary and Carri Johnson, is reputed to be the most intelligent and highly trained elephant in the world. When she wasn't on the set, Tai lived a pampered existence in a double truck trailer.

Tai had to give up her trailer for the location work, however; she flew to Hawaii via UPS delivery. Initially, the shipping company volunteered to fly the pachyderm for free, in return for filming a television commercial around the trip. Tai was the single largest item ever shipped, and ensuring her safe transport offered the company an unprecedented challenge. The deal was broken when the Walt Disney

Getting advice on his love life from Ape, transplanting the cartoon humor to live action.





# GEORGE'S TRICK JUNGLE

*Designing cartoon gags to work in live action.*

By Scott Tracy  
Griffin

A veritable army of craftsmen were hired to bring GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE to life on the big screen. Not only did the producers seek to create something unique and visually compelling, but they had to create a fantastic jungle world on a soundstage that would blend seamlessly with exterior footage shot in Hawaii.

"I looked at numerous visual references, like the paintings of Rousseau, with the big leaves, and I thought that was a good

Fraser rehearses a scene with a Henson Creature Shop mechanical snake; a wrestling scene was scrapped.



launching point," said production designer Stephen Marsh, explaining how he embarked on his task by researching photos and paintings of the jungle. His crew crafted artificial plants with huge leaves to give the jungle a "super-realistic feel," and combined these with 5,000 live plants of 50 varieties cultivated in a greenhouse outside the studio.

"We constantly exchanged plants so that you never saw a dead one, kind of like Disneyland, but on a bigger scale," Marsh chuckled. Thirteen greensmen were employed to care for the plants, which were regularly rotated to the greenhouse to be watered, fed, trimmed, and sunned, before being returned to duty. According to the designer, the entire set was reworked every two days.

Marsh also sampled films from the genre's origins. "I watched all the old Tarzan movies, and they weren't what I thought they'd be," he said. "I felt they were going to be fun and slightly daffy, and some of them were pretty horrific and scary and dark." Nonetheless, despite their sometimes mature subject matter, Marsh liked the look of the films.

"We decided that although our project wasn't going to be a period film, we'd try and capture that zaniness from those '30s and '40s jungle movies. We tried to incorporate that into the wardrobe, the hair, and the



Above: Filming Ape on the set, animatronics by the Henson Creature Shop. Below: Phillip Tan (l) and Tom Fischer rehearse the gorilla action before donning the radio-controlled head gear and full-body suit for the cameras.



design of the picture. I think we got about 80 percent of what we wanted for this picture—there's a slight feeling of watching a daffy, '30s picture, like a throwback to another time."

Jim Henson's Creature Shop was tasked with creating the animatronic animals, whose development offers a window into the typical creative process for such effects. "When the project began, the ruling opinion from the studio was that this was to be hyper-realistic—we're in the real world," noted David Bar-

ington Holt, Henson's creative supervisor. "What quickly emerged as we started to design the characters, is that the interrelationship between George and the gorillas presented authenticity problems. Real gorillas are stone-faced and unexpressive, won't look humans in the eye, and have certain physical characteristics that make it difficult for them to be counterparts to human actors for the length of time required to develop an on-screen relationship.

continued on page 61

Fraser swings on production designer Stephen Marsh's lush tropic set, counterbalanced on a teeterboard attached to a camera truck for tracking shots.





legal department balked at signing the contract, and the production was forced to pay \$80,000 in shipping charges each way for the elephant's delivery. Tai's debut on the islands was a media event that garnered bigger headlines than Michael Jackson's arrival on the same day.

Another famous animal performer, Binks the capuchin monkey (OUTBREAK, the ACE VENTURA movies), joined the cast. Trained by April Mockin, Binks and his fellow capuchin extras captivated their human castmates with their unerring ability to hit their marks.

Some exterior shots were done in Hawaii, but the balance of the jungle scenes were filmed on a soundstage. The cavernous Hughes Aircraft plant, in the Playa Del Rey area of Los Angeles, was chosen. According to Kerner, the fact that INDEPENDENCE DAY had filmed there was considered a good omen.

The main jungle set measured 350 feet long by 90 feet deep and 70 feet high. The set had to accommodate the 8,000-pound Tai, as well as cranes for the vine-swinging sequences and other equipment, and it had to be sturdy. A wood frame was built, then covered with concrete reinforced with rebar.

"It was built like a parking garage, because it had to carry an 8,000-pound elephant and the trees couldn't shake," recalled production designer Stephen Marsh. "You've got to build extremely strong sets if you've got an elephant walking around on them."

The animal performers needed other unique considerations built into the set design. The perches for the various animals and birds needed a certain circumference; platforms for the lion to jump about had to be constructed to precise specifications. Appropriate entrances and exits were also required for Tai, the lion, and other animals. The set design was an impressive accomplishment. (See sidebar, page 10.)

Ward's family visited the set many times, and gave it their approval. "They had a ball," commented Hoberman. "They really liked the quality and scope of what we were doing."

Exterior shots were filmed in

## PRODUCER DAVID HOBERMAN

**"I think our mantra was that we were making one of these big summer franchise movies, and we had to give the audience something they had never seen before."**



Director Sam Weisman (top) and producer Jordan Kerner with Henson Creature Shop apes, their live-action homage to animator Jay Ward.

Northern California and Hawaii. According to Marsh, Hawaii was "rainy, muggy, buggy, and dirty." It rained every day before photography began, so the producers recruited a kahuna [priest] to bless the shoot each morning. Perhaps the kahuna was onto something—the crew was graced with nine consecutive days of sunshine, and the production ran smoothly. Cinematographer Thomas Ackerman (JUMANJI) was able to blend the artificial light and Hawaiian sunlight so seamlessly that it's often impossible to tell which shots were indoor and which were outdoor.

Besides Hawaii and Northern California, location work also included in San Francisco, where Ursula tries to civilize her ape man. Perhaps the most fantastic stunt for the film was shot on San Francisco's Bay Bridge. In the script's original draft, George rescued a jumper on the Golden Gate Bridge. This didn't pass muster with the San Francisco bridge authorities, who weren't happy with

the idea of depicting the bridge as a method of suicide. The scene was rewritten for George to rescue a stranded parasailer tangled in the cables of the Bay Bridge, and Joey Preston, a former South African circus aerialist, was hired to double for Fraser. Filming the stunt required several takes of Preston swinging 200 feet from the top of the bridge, which was 500 feet above the traffic.

The incident exacerbated a simmering controversy in the Bay area. Disruptions due to film production are already a hot button topic in San Francisco. Opportunistic pols used the GEORGE shoot as a scapegoat, blaming traffic jams on the production even when the crew wasn't filming.

The debate was launched on the first day of shooting the scene, before Preston ever took to the wires. An establishing shot required that a dummy of the parasailer to be hung from the bridge. As the filming commenced, an officious motorist took initiative and called, not

the police, but a local television news program to report the stranded sailer. Instead of checking with Cal Trans for on-going film permits, the station deployed its news chopper. In a bizarre case of life imitating art in progress, the crew continued to film while actual reporters covered the scene in the background. As with most of George's stunts and effects, the scene was executed flawlessly.

"I think our mantra was that we were making one of these big summer franchise movies, and we had to give the audience something they had never seen before," said Hoberman of the sequence and the film's overall visual appeal.

"That's something that was always at the front of our mind," noted Hoberman, "whether it was the incredible treehouse set, the jungle set, or the CGI Shep... There are a number of elements that are original to this film, all of it building on a love story that really holds everything together."

When asked why audiences should choose George over the other summer films, Kerner summed it up by saying, "It's very funny—it'll be an alternative to all the other films this summer. It has a tremendous heart... a big romance... and you'll feel elevated about yourself and the world around you." □

Fraser poses with Tai, his 8,000-pound elephant co-star, doubled with a CGI model for trick shots.





# Robert Zemeckis'

# CONTACT

**Carl Sagan's novel comes to life with Jodie Foster his explorer of the infinite.**

*By Douglas Eby*

Encounters with aliens have been a rich dramatic theme since the earliest days of film, and new movies, not to mention TV series well-known to *CFQ* readers, continue to be launched around that theme. Director Robert Zemeckis' *CONTACT* is concerned, not so much with aliens themselves, as with the result of their presence, the social and personal impacts. After the discovery of a coded message from the Vega star system, a message detailing the construction of some sort of space travel vehicle, radio astronomer Dr. Ellie Arrowway (Jodie Foster), in the middle of much political turmoil, is elected to pilot the craft for a presumed meeting with the aliens. Warner Bros. opens Zemeckis' film nationwide July 11th.

But, as James Woods (playing a National Security Advisor) confirmed, this is not a hardware movie: "Not at all; and I want to make sure people understand that. I think if any of us were faced with that reality [making contact with an alien civilization], our response would be—and this is what I love about this movie—everyone thinks about what it would do to society at large. It's like what happened when the first eclipse was glimpsed by primitive man. Whole religions were founded on those events." And screenwriter Michael Goldenberg noted this "is a different tone than a film like *INDEPENDENCE DAY*, which takes a broader approach. The idea here was, what would really happen?"

Alien interactions with human society, such as UFOs and crop circles, are tantalizing mysteries, part of our evolution in scientific understanding. The director of the TV movie *ROSWELL*, Jeremy Kagan noted in *Cinefantastique*, in our August, 1994 issue, that his film is an example of looking



Jena Malone as young Ellie Arrowway talking to far-away voices with father Tod Arrowway on his home radio, the preface to *CONTACT*, the film version of Carl Sagan's best-seller about mankind's first encounter with extraterrestrials.

at life with a wider vision: "I've become more aware that we have been educated to see the things that are in front of us, and not other things that may also be in front of us, whether they are ghosts or alien presences or other versions of ourselves. I think we are in the time—and maybe it's the end of the millennium—where our awareness level lets us look at life in a deeper, more dense way and we see these other realities."

The origin for *CONTACT* was in that kind of interest in "other realities," as well as the established verities of astronomy. Carl Sagan wrote his only novel, the basis for the film, in the mid '80s, but his wife (and co-producer and story contributor) Ann Druyan (pronounced dree-an) noted his interest in SETI, the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, had been there a long time: "He started writing about it in the early fifties, and was a pioneer in making SETI a respectable scientific area of research," said Druyan. She is excited about the way the film is coming together and feels it "will affect people, shake them up, and will convey something of the true grandeur of the universe. For me, it's that possibility that makes the seventeen-year journey even that

much more meaningful."

Sagan was passionate about popularizing science, and wrote more than two dozen books, hundreds of articles and hosted the 1980 PBS series *COSMOS*. "I think he was the leading scientist on Earth in the efforts to inquire about extraterrestrial life," said Louis Friedman, president of the Planetary Society, which Sagan co-founded. The work of the SETI Institute, at the heart of the film, has had a \$58 million government investment and a long history of cooperation with NASA, with further funding suddenly cut off in 1993. But the institute continues as Project Phoenix, with its mission intact, as their Inter-

net site declares, "to find evidence of intelligence elsewhere in the universe."

A number of the key filmmakers on *CONTACT* have commented on how wide-ranging the film has been in terms of the moral and philosophical implications of a human meeting with an alien civilization, and Druyan noted that she has also been interested in those larger issues "from day one. Going back to the moment that my wonderful late husband Carl Sagan and I sat on a patio in West Hollywood, talking about what the story would include. We were very excited about the notion of creating a story that was rip-roaring and exciting and had a kind of suspenseful pacing and action, but that was also an opportunity to kind of joyfully explore these questions."

At the beginning of his 1985 novel, Sagan included a poem by Marvin, a fifth grader from Harlem: "My heart trembles like a poor leaf / The planets whirl in my dreams / The stars press against my window / I rotate in my sleep / My bed is a warm planet." That sensibility very much fits *CONTACT*'s central character, radio astronomer Ellie. Recalling the times Jodie





Director Robert Zemeckis (center) and cinematographer Don Burgess set up a shot with Jodie Foster as Dr. Eleanor "Ellie" Arroway, in a ship built with instructions from transmissions from distant star, Vega.

Foster met with Sagan during his last days alive, and how Foster fit the role, Druyan said, "Carl and I looked at each other and said 'Ellie lives.'"

Foster was drawn to the story because of, among other things, the intense involvement her character has with her work: "The foremost thing about Ellie's character, that's true in the book, in the screenplay, and definitely on screen, is that she is completely and totally passionate," Foster said. "And that's something that I was dying to play: somebody that is very involved and very focused on an intellectual process, and that that process allows her to fly in ways that feels very loving and emotional. And feels very human. I think too often, intellectual processes are portrayed as some kind of dry, scientific thing that doesn't have a connection to the soul. And when you're obsessed by something, when something fascinates you, it's wondrous. And in fact, if anything, I think she's a zealot, so it's actually kind of a movie about a zealot who learns to have tolerance for other people's zeal."

Screenwriter Michael Goldenberg (who wrote and directed *BED OF ROSES*) recalled Foster getting involved early on in the development process. "And she certainly had input," said Goldenberg. "She was very respectful of the story, and very much approaching it as an actor,

although we all know she has chops as a director as well, and a writer. She always had strong ideas, great ideas. We were trying to encourage her to bring in even more." In crafting the screenplay, Goldenberg also worked closely with Zemeckis "from day one," which he found very positive. "I don't want to sound too gushy, but it was sort of the idyllic screenwriter's experience, especially on a movie this big where you tend to have a lot of nervous studio people, and money. Fortunately when you've got someone like Bob running the show, he set the tone for everything and made it a breeze, a pleasure."

Goldenberg found that Zemeckis also "felt very strongly about this being an internal journey, the human journey, and this one human's journey as sort of the

John Hurt (*ALIEN*) as multinational corporate tycoon S.R. Haddon, who finances a Japanese starship to carry Foster, after saboteurs blow up the U.S. model.



**“Too often intellectual processes are portrayed as dry and scientific without a connection to the soul. For Ellie, it's something wondrous.”**

—Jodie Foster, *Explorer*—

metaphor for all of us. One of the things I'm proudest of is the way we've been able to take a lot of ideas—and there are a lot of ideas in the book, about science and religion, humanity's destiny—and embody them in these real, living, breathing characters, and sort of get the best of both worlds. What was unique about this was being able to work on a scale this large, to tell this kind of epic story, and to have all the tools of modern digital filmmaking at your disposal." Those characters also include, beside Foster and Woods, Matthew McConaughey, John Hurt, Tom Skerritt, David Morse, Rob Lowe, and Angela Bassett.

One of the things Woods (who has referred to himself as 'the epitome of nerd-dom,' being an ex-math student at MIT) liked about the film is that it emphasized the internal, personal dimensions of the story. Noted Woods, "When all this new technology is available to us, CGI and so on, I was really impressed that Bob Zemeckis chose to do what was really the most important thing, and it's always, as a true nerd knows, that everything takes place in the human mind. I was really pleased to work with a guy who wanted to take the internal journey, rather than what I call the 'T-shirt journey.' The movie's really about religion as much as about science. And it also points out the collision between and collusion of science and faith."

Producer Steve Starkey, commenting on the nature of the film's Sony Imageworks visual effects, commented: "We're playing a little bit with time-space travel, manipulating somewhat our main character's trip through space, taking her through a series of emotions that will transform her in front of your eyes... We're going to try to play with time through imagery, so in that way we're using the computer to play a little." Asked about the famed *Stargate* sequence "ride through space" in 2001, Starkey noted, "That was really just on a guy's face, with a split screen light show. This is evolving that much more. Our ride, I hope, will be something very new and innovative, that you have never seen anywhere before. It's going to be a wild trip." □



# SPAWN

## Director Mark Dippé and ILM bring Todd McFarlane's hit comic book to the screen.

By James Van Hise

He's a hero for the '90s. Cloaked in black he prowls the back alleys of the cities, never showing his face because he doesn't have one: it was burned off. His name is Spawn—as in Hellspawn. His adversaries are even more frightening than he is, and he's coming to movie screens August 22.

Created in 1992 by artist/writer Todd McFarlane, the comic book *Spawn* was one of the first properties launched by Image Comics, a company formed by a number of successful but disaffected artists who quit working for Marvel Comics *en masse* and walked out to prove that there was a better way than being well-paid but disrespected employees. They decided to be their own bosses and publish characters that they owned. *Spawn* has remained the most popular of the line, becoming the best-selling comic book in the United States virtually over night and remaining at the top of the heap for nearly five years now.

But the Hollywood studios didn't wait to see whether *Spawn* had legs. They courted creator Todd McFarlane as soon as the book achieved its instant popularity. McFarlane observed, "They must have seen a couple comic book charts that had *Spawn* at the top of the chart and went, 'Hey, they've got something that's bigger and better than Batman or Superman, so we'll just go in there and rob it from the kid and we'll be done with it.'"



Producer Clint Goldman (l), producer Todd McFarlane, and director Mark Dippé. McFarlane liked the New Line team, and felt he could trust it with his creation.

But McFarlane wasn't interested in just taking the money and running with it. The comic book was making so much money for him that he had the luxury of saying no to deals that a less successful artist would have grabbed. The most realistic offer came from Columbia, but after four months it fell apart over the studio's insistence on a contract which bought all rights and cut McFarlane off from profit participation above a certain ceiling. "So if this thing goes to the fucking moon then I get dropped off a third of the way there? It was just silliness," McFarlane stated.

He chose to make a deal with New Line Cinema because their recent acquisition by Ted Turner insured bigger budgets on their films. Plus New Line head Mike DeLuca was already a fan of the *Spawn* comic book and

knew exactly what he was getting into. And McFarlane liked New Line's team: producer Clint Goldman and director Mark Dippé's effects specialists trained at ILM.

Recalled Dippé, "Todd suggested, hey, why don't you guys make this film? I wrote a story based on the comic book and Todd liked what I put together, and I took it over to New Line." McFarlane signed with New Line, and the agreement stipulated that Goldman, Dippé and ILM computer animator Steve "Spaz" Williams be attached to the project in significant roles. By 1995 *SPAWN* was in preproduction with a screenplay by Dippé and Alan McElroy. It began filming in August 1996 and wrapped principal photography last November.

Cast in the lead is Michael Jai White (recently seen in the

lead role of TYSON on HBO). Although seen early in the film as his human character, Al Simmons, after he is killed, sent to Hell and returned to Earth as Spawn, he is forever in costume. Noted White of the experience, "The special effects makeup artists had done the NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET series and I was going to wind up having just as many or more makeup days as Freddy Krueger. I had just as much prosthetics plus a rubber suit. It proved to be a task to complete a 14- to 16-hour day."

The bizarre character of Clown is played by the equally bizarre John Leguizamo, perhaps the most unusual character actor working in Hollywood today. In the last two years he has played a heavy in *ROMEO AND JULIET*, a transvestite in *TO WONG FOO, THANKS FOR EVERYTHING, JULIE NEWMAR*, and the bizarre lead in *THE PEST*. For *SPAWN* Leguizamo had to don a fat suit which gave him the appearance of a repulsive 350-pound monstrosity who is capable of morphing into the 12-foot-tall monster called The Violator.

Describing what it was like playing Clown, the actor explained that the costume was pure agony, because he had to walk hunched-over to appear to be very short, and it was very hot. "It started out at 30 pounds but by the time the sweat was on it was 40 or 50 because it was like a sponge and it'd soak it up," said Leguizamo. "Then they'd have to give me another suit the next day to let the other





Michael Jai White stars as Spawn, the popular superhero from Hell, based on the #1 selling comic book character. Right: John Leguizamo stars as Clown, Spawn's adversary, in rather heavy costuming created by the KNB effects group.



one dry off. What's fascinating is that the costume ends up helping you create the character, because the limitations that it gave me also created the walk—the behavior.”

In describing the character Leguizamo revealed that his final characterization emerged during the first scene he shot, which was with Martin Sheen. “I was drinking a lot of coffee and I was really mad because they made me wait, and so Clown was born that day out of coffee and rage, and from the embers arose a character unlike anything I've done before.”

Leguizamo's costume for Clown was constructed by KNB (Bob Kurtzman, Greg Nicatero and Howard Berger), who also built the various incarnations of the Spawn costume as well as the full-scale versions of The Violator. Tom Peitzman, the effects producer, explained that even though many

scenes with the Violator would be done in CGI, others would involve the full-scale, live-action version on set. “For certain applications we decided that it was best to actually build a practical Violator, the reason being you can get that actual interaction between Spawn and Violator for the intimate moments. But for the wide shots when you see Violator head to

Melinda Clarke as Jessica Priest, with White as Al Simons before he is killed, sent to Hell and transformed into Spawn. New Line opens the film nationwide August 22.



“[The studios] must have seen a couple comic book charts that had *Spawn* at the top, and went ... ‘we'll just go in there and rob it from the kid.’”

toe, that's when we'll go in and use the 3-D model built in the computer to actually achieve those shots. So there's always that tricky line of cutting back and forth between a CG character and a practical character, making sure that they match and that they interact and don't look like two different entities. I just did *THE RELIC* and we had the same type of thing.”

The computer-generated imaging on *SPAWN* will also include something unique—a

he said. “It's very expensive and it has to look really hot in the sense of, literally, temperature. It just gives us more latitude than normally we would have on a stage. We can actually design a foreground action and make the camera respond as opposed to being locked to what a camera is doing, which is the typical format we follow.”

Producer Clint Goldman previously worked as the senior producer at ILM on *THE MASK* but feels that *SPAWN* is a better film.

“It did fun things that people hadn't seen before. They made you see images you had seen before, but not necessarily in the same context. But we have that going for us in *SPAWN*, too. They'll definitely see things they haven't seen before. You may have seen things like the dinosaurs in *JURASSIC PARK* but you may not have seen something like the Violator who battles Spawn. So in that respect it's different, and we're creating our own version of digital Hell where the final battle takes place.”

Todd McFarlane is looking forward to the film but his intention is that the audience enjoy the film as a whole and not just for its dynamic effects and monsters. “I think that we all

have some weird fascination to some extent with monsters. I'm more concerned if they're going to buy the in-between stuff, instead of just biding their time to get to the cool stuff, which is tough to do when you're doing an action movie because it's not high art. You've gotta' know your audience so you can't get into too much character because to some extent you're working towards a big bazooka blast. But it would be nice if they actually liked the movie, too.” □



# MEN IN BLACK

**A comic book look at illegal aliens—from outer space.**

*By Judd Hollander  
& Sue Feinberg*

The idea that aliens exist among us, walking the streets in human form, is the basic premise of *MEN IN BLACK* (MIB), a high-tech and deliciously down-to-earth sci-fi comedy adventure. Courtesy of Columbia/TriStar and Amblin Entertainment, the film is scheduled for release July 2. Based on the comic book series by Lowell Cunningham, it stars Tommy Lee Jones as the veteran agent "K," part of the shadowy MIB organization, whose job it is to police illegal extraterrestrial alien activity. Will Smith plays "J," a New York cop who stumbles into some "next level shit" and teams up with Jones to stop an alien terrorist and save Earth in the bargain.

When producers Walter F. Parkes and Laurie MacDonald first saw the *MIB* comic book, they thought it had great cinematic potential, one that was a welcome departure from many of the alien movies that had come before (or since). "We thought it was wonderful that the main characters were hu-



Director Barry Sonnenfeld rehearsing Tommy Lee Jones as agent "K," one of the mysterious Men in Black.

man beings," Parkes recalled. "And [the story's] not taking place in some distant galaxy."

However, Earth is not the planet where the elite of the extraterrestrial set come to meet. Rather it is the underside, the "scum of the universe" who have chosen to make Earth their home. Noted the film's director, Barry Sonnenfeld, "There's a line when Tommy says to Will,

'Ever see the movie *CASABLANCA*?' And Will says 'Yeah.' And Tommy says, 'We're sort of the same thing without Nazis.' [The Earth] is kind of a no-man's land for aliens. If you need to hide, if you need to escape, or if they need to meet when no one's going to see them, you come to Earth because we're in the middle of nowhere." As long as these alien visitors are peaceful, there's no problem. But when they're not, it's up to the *MEN IN BLACK* to stop them.

Once Columbia secured the project from Malibu comics, which published the MIB series, Parkes and MacDonald began assembling their creative team. First on board was screenwriter Ed Solomon (*LEAVING NORMAL* and co-writer of the *BILL & TED* movies) "I wasn't initially interested in doing it," remembered Solomon, "because I'm not really into adapting other people's work. But I sat down with [the materials] to make some notes, to make sure I'd given it some thought and then sort of respectfully decline and suddenly I got this idea for half the





**PRODUCER WALTER PARKES**

**“Trying to merge science fiction and police detective fiction is a tall order. Detective stories are about details. Science fiction jumps over details into bigger concepts.”**

movie.”

For spec script writer Solomon, this was his first studio assignment. “I realized that all of the spec scripts I had written had been changed so much, that if I was really going to write a Hollywood movie, I might as well write a Hollywood movie,” said Solomon. “[Parkes] called me and said, ‘It’ll take you six weeks to write.’ And I thought, ‘Great, six weeks. I’ll make the money I need to, then I’ll go write my own spec script and direct it.” That was in January, 1993. “Four years and a head of gray hair later, I’m still working on that movie,” Solomon added, laughing.

A number of circumstances conspired to push the film’s completion back several years. Chief among them was finding the right tone for the script. Early on, Parkes and MacDonald wanted to make MIB a very simple film, a standard police procedural drama, but one combining science fiction with the detective story. Putting two such highly different genres together, so both equally figure into the plot, proved no easy

task.

“Trying to merge science fiction and police detective fiction is a very tall order,” Parkes noted. “Because detective fiction or police procedural stories are very much about details. The fingerprints, the clues, the Maltese Falcon etc., which lead the story from plot point to plot point. Science fiction tends to jump over details and get into bigger ideas, bigger concepts and bigger emotional moments. [For example] you don’t ask yourself why [this alien] breathes air, because there’s this other story which is more interesting.”

Parkes, who’s also a writer, admitted he himself tried to merge the two forms together in the past without much success. “So I was aware of that challenge in the early development phase with Ed [Solomon]. And it just took a long time to come up with a story that was both satisfying on its own terms, on the terms of what of our humans reveal, and the ride that the audience was taken on, but also as a platform for our ideas and special effects and concepts.”

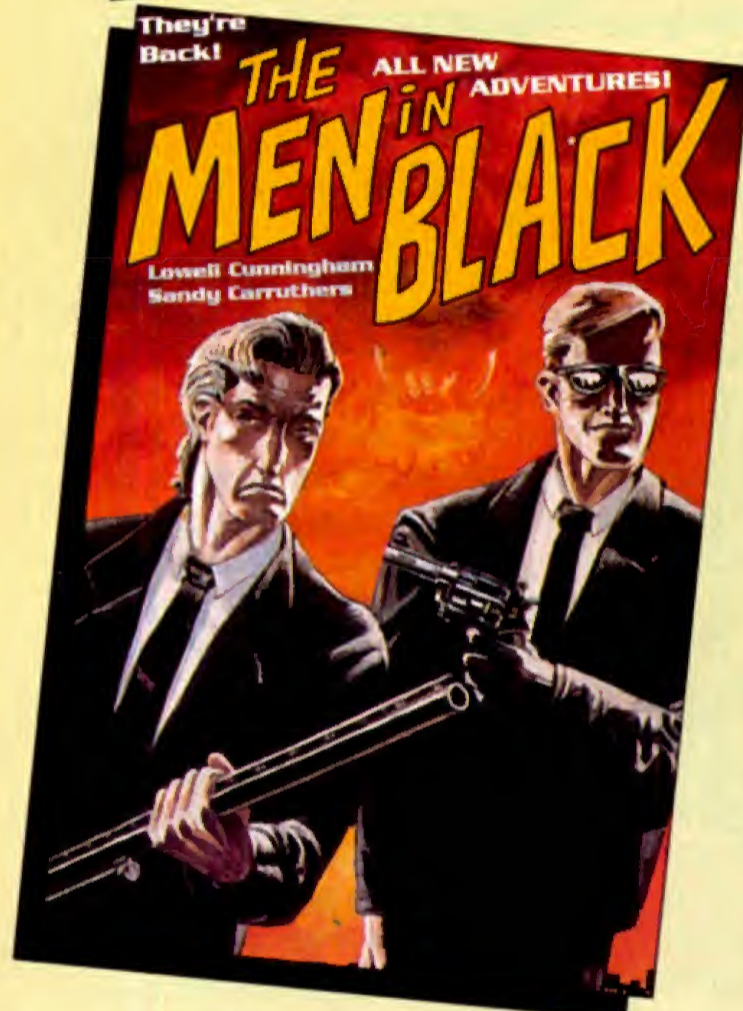
The early drafts of the script



Carel Struycken (Lurch in Sonnenfeld’s *THE ADDAMS FAMILY*), plays an alien emigre in line (below) at the MIB New York headquarters, the Ellis Island of the universe. Alien makeups for the film (l) were supervised by Oscar-winner, Rick Baker.







# MIB

## THE COMICS

*Creator Lowell Cunningham on becoming a Hollywood observer.*

*By Judd Hollander  
and Sue Feinberg*

A decade or so ago, Lowell Cunningham was driving with a friend near the campus of the University of Knoxville, Tennessee, where Cunningham was living at time. As they were moving along, they saw this big, black car pass them by. The friend, who was a UFO buff, remarked that this was the same kind of vehicle the Men In Black would drive. Curious, Cunningham began pressing for details and the germ of an idea began to form.

"He told me how these mysterious Men in Black would show up where people are said to have had UFO sightings and cover it up. I thought that sounded like a great idea for a comic book series or a television series." Realizing the comic book industry was an easier place to break in, Cunningham set his sights in that direction. Taking the idea from what he learned in that car ride, Cunningham began constructing his story, being careful to steer clear of any UFO books or folklore connection. "I didn't want to be copying from anybody," he said. "These UFO books are presented as factual, but I didn't want to push the point."

Cunningham moved the MIB out of the UFO arena, sending them on the trail of any sort of paranormal activity, from ghosts to aliens to monsters of various types. And he created the characters of "J" and "K." ("I got the idea that most spies had numbers, so I gave mine letters.")

Several years and a number of rejections later, MIB found a home at Malibu Comics. "I sent it to them on a Monday and Friday got a phone call from them saying, 'We want to do it.' It was a nice change of pace from having to wait months at a time to get a negative response." *The Men In Black*, (as opposed to MEN IN BLACK, which is the title the film uses), initially ran three issues in the form of graphic novels and were later combined to form a trade paperback. The series sold well enough for Malibu to commission a second three issues. In addition, a one-shot comic is on the schedule to appear as part of the film promotion, with the possibility of more to come in the future.

While Cunningham was grateful to Malibu for picking up MIB, he also knows that if he approached the company today with the project, chances are they would turn him down. "At the time, Malibu was going through some stylistic changes and the comic market was changing too. These were black and white comics and the black and white boom was fading at that time. I think I caught the last crest of the wave. Shortly after that, Malibu switched over to doing color comics and superhero comics, which they had never done before. It just didn't fit the new format for the company."

When Hollywood beckoned, Cunningham was ready and has nothing but good memories from the experience. "I did ask that they let me see the [creative] process, because that's something that was new to me. They did, and I came out to LA for about two months and watched them shoot and watched the dailies as much as I could and had a good time. I like what I have seen. I think they cast it well. I think the production values are super and I feel well-served."

The beginning of the process that led to the filming of Cunningham's creation was a meeting at Malibu set up with ICM to show some of the properties the comic book company had. Included in that list was *The Men In Black*. As Cunningham remembered, MIB sparked quite a bit of interest with several film studios bidding for the rights, with the two finalists being Fox and Columbia.

"Eventually, Cunningham flew to out to Los Angeles to meet with producers Walter Parkes, Laurie MacDonald and several others who were involved in the project, with one notable exception: Steven Spielberg. ("I was in the same room [with him] but I didn't want to be pushy and introduce myself.")

When Cunningham flew out for the initial meeting, he brought along some background materials he had written, some of which were later incorporated into the film. Specifically, a special black card that can become any type of card the MIB happen to need, from FBI identification to an ATM card. (This device had not appeared previously in the comics.) Additionally, Cunningham points to several

The film is loosely based on the comic book series created by Lowell Cunningham and artist Sandy Carruthers for Malibu Comics, cover art by Adam Adamowitz. A new movie tie-in edition of the comic is due this July.

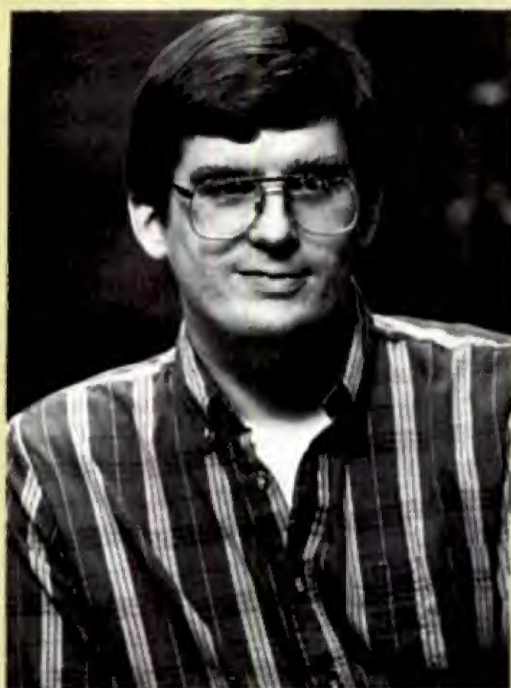


scenes in the movie script, including one in which a farmer is taken over by aliens, that were taken from the comics.

Besides making a cameo in the film and observing the moviemaking process ("I learned what 'back to one' means. It means 'We're going to shoot it again, so get back to where you started from, so you can do your bit.'"), Cunningham also kept himself busy "star-watching," as he put it. One interesting sight was seeing JEOPARDY host Alex Trebeck come on the set when they were shooting in the MIB headquarters. Cunningham didn't find out what Trebeck was doing there until a few days later when he caught him on an episode of THE X-FILES playing a Man in Black. "[I guess] he wanted to see what it was all about."

In addition to *The Men in Black*, Cunningham has written several other comics and has pitched a batch of ideas to STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE. He's also got a column called "Strange Happenings" in *Expose* magazine. To date, he has had no meetings with any mysterious men in sunglasses who drive big, black cars—at least not that he can remember. However he did receive an interesting letter from a major UFO writer when the comics first appeared. "His letter said, 'We know what you're doing. Stop it or we'll singe your nose hairs with a blowtorch.' That was the whole letter, which I actually took as a compliment. [Kind of like] a friendly insult. I didn't have the least bit of fear after reading that. I thought it was like a tip of the hat." □

Comic book creator Lowell Cunningham, getting a lesson in big-budget Hollywood movie-making.



## ON CHOOSING A DIRECTOR

**"The movie is comedic and sophisticated," said producer Walter Parkes, "imaginative and stylish. Add that all up, you come down to a surprising few who can do justice to it."**



Jones checks out an illegal alien with partner "J" (Will Smith). The wide-eyed "everyman" Smith is a foil for the deadpan world-weary cynic, Jones. Right: Linda Fiorentino plays New York City pathologist Dr. Laurel Weaver.

placed a heavy emphasis on comedy, as well as a plot that was "very imaginative but overly complicated," as MacDonald put it. Originally, the story was set in various places around the United States including Kansas, the District of Columbia, Philadelphia and Las Vegas. Eventually, except for the opening scenes, the entire story was moved to New York City.

Another major alteration dealt with Edgar, (actor Vincent D'Onofrio), the villain of the piece. He was originally envisioned as a combination prophet/snake oil salesman who comes down and charms the entire world by inviting Earth to join other alien races in some sort of global family of man. (Parkes called him an evil version of Michael Rennie from *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*, where "everybody believed him except for 'K,' who, being the universe weary, cynical MIB, knows that no upstanding alien would ever land here and cut this planet a break. So 'K' becomes the lone voice of dissent and skepticism.") That went by the boards and Edgar, (a "bug-like" crea-

ture) now doesn't reveal himself for what he actually is until the last ten minutes or so of the film.

Also helping the process, was the fact that, during the development stages, Parkes and MacDonald left Columbia (they were independent producers on the lot) to become the presidents of Amblin Entertainment. Steven Spielberg hired them to replace Kathy Kennedy and Frank Marshal. The two thought their new boss might be interested in MIB and, with Columbia's blessing, brought it to his attention. Spielberg was indeed interested and became MIB's executive producer, which resulted in the film being released under the TriStar/Amblin banners. Currently Parkes and MacDonald are running the motion picture department at Dreamworks.

**W**hen deciding on who the project should be helmed by, Parkes and MacDonald found their choices surprisingly limited. "The movie from the outset had a very unique blending of tones,"

Parkes recalled. "It's comedic and sophisticated, it's imaginative and stylish. And when you really add that all up, you come down to a surprisingly few number of people [who can do justice to the work]."

Of that group, Barry Sonnenfeld's name was at the top of the list. A self-described "little bit of an anarchist, with a skewed point of view about things, who tends to see comedy in situations that other people don't," Sonnenfeld was instantly attracted to the project. "I first read it about three years ago and I thought in some small



way it captured that feeling of when you walk down the street and see some guy yelling to himself or try to deal with some weird-looking guy at a car rental counter, that this guy just can't be of this planet, he's just too weird. I felt this, in some comedic way, explained all of those strange encounters with strange people we've had. They're aliens."

However before Sonnenfeld could formally sign-on ("we were talking about the script and making notes"), *GET SHORTY*, a film he had sought to make for years, was given the green light to begin production. At which point, he regretfully departed from MIB. Parkes admitted while they did consider hiring another director, they ultimately felt "Barry understands this material so well, that he's worth waiting for." Sonnenfeld's departure added another 18 months or so to the movie's gestation.

As Sonnenfeld happily pointed out, "I got to have my cake and eat it too." Doing *GET SHORTY* first, also provided Sonnenfeld with a bit of training for MIB, as he felt the two movies were quite similar in



one important area. "GET SHORTY was a movie whose humor came from not acknowledging the comedy. MEN IN BLACK is very much the same thing. As soon as you have these actors acknowledge that it's weird and unusual for them to be dealing with aliens and sort of wink at the audience and say, 'Hey guys, we're not taking this seriously,' then the audience won't take it seriously either."

Sonnenfeld was also instrumental in having the film set in New York. Having grown up in the Big Apple and living there most of his life, he felt that the city, with its energy and speed, its multi-cultural melting pot of people and myriads of different neighborhoods existing side by side, would be the perfect place for aliens to go to blend in with the general population. "I felt Las Vegas is used too often as a way to sort of say, 'goofy,' and I find Washington incredibly boring, visually. Washington's a really hard place to shoot because it's not about people, it's about architecture. I also live in New York and wanted to work near home and wanted to see if I could convince them to do that by coming up with reasons why aliens would feel more comfortable living in New York. I just find New York such an energetic, interesting place to make movies." Considering the recent

Jones at MIB headquarters with agent "Z" (Rip Torn), riding herd on the dregs of the universe.



# MIB

## DEVELOPMENT HELL

*Scripter Ed Solomon on his baptism of fire in the ways of studio rewrites.*

*By Judd Hollander & Sue Feinberg*

When writing any film, there are invariably parts of the script that fall by the wayside. Hollywood is littered with tales of such incidents. So too, was it the case with MEN IN BLACK. As the script went through its development process, while the core of the piece remained the same, the tone and scope of it changed... and changed...and changed. In fact it changed so many times and so much that screenwriter Ed Solomon, who was on board from the first day to the last, estimates there was enough material thrown out to make at least 18 additional MIB movies. Of his abandoned ideas, Solomon noted "most of them have been recycled [by now] and are probably cocktail napkins at some politically correct coffee shop." (One such sequence, originally discussed, but never scripted, had the MIB chasing aliens through a science-fiction convention where William Shatner was signing autographs.)

"What I brought to MIB was a goofiness, a sense of flamboyance and strangeness to the characters and maybe a level of humor to it," said Solomon. "I think many of my ideas were very odd and not mainstream enough. Fortunately, there were always people to tell me when I was going off track. Personally, if I was left alone, I probably would have written a quirkier, stranger film that probably wouldn't appeal to as many people."



Framing the action, screenwriter Ed Solomon (l) with BILL & TED 2 director Pete Hewitt.

Solomon wrote a very strange film initially, at the urging of the producers. "I was told at the very beginning of the process by the studio, 'Go crazy. Don't even worry. Let your imagination have no limit' and [then] all of that then comes to bite you on the butt later on when they say, 'It's too crazy, it's too big [Solomon laughed]. Didn't you put any limits on your imagination?' And you start to work within more of a structured profile, which is ultimately what it always ends up being."

In a telephone interview, Solomon ticked off some of the changes the MIB screenplay went through. "The first draft was a very, very loopy comedy which was more fantastical in tone and took place all over the country. When Tommy Lee Jones got involved, we made

the decision to temper it and make it darker, more suited to the character Tommy would play.

"When Barry Sonnenfeld got involved, he got this great idea to set it in New York. We decided for several reasons, partly budget, but mostly aesthetic, to make the movie smaller in scope, not have it go all over the country and focus it more on the cops-on-the-beat kind of element.

"And we toned it down yet again. In fact, to quote from Barry, he said to me with a smile on his face, 'Ed, I know I've been saying for the last several months that this movie is a comedy, well now I want it to be darker.' So we took another pass through and darkened it up once more and then we realized we had, as Barry said, 'Sprayed too much laugh off' it and had to put more of the comedy back.

"Then when [actor] Will [Smith] got involved, we adapted it again to fit him. When the production designer, Bo Welch, who I think is a total genius, got involved, we adapted the script to take into account his vision.

"Then once you start active preproduction, all sorts of things happen. They tell you, 'Okay we can't get this location, we've got to go there,' so you're rewriting; they tell you 'It's way too expensive. You've got to cut all of this out. There are too many aliens. There are too many effects.' We did that and they say, 'There are not enough aliens' and we had to come up with ways to do crea-





Solomon was instructed to let his mind run wild in envisioning Earth's emigres from outer space, makeups supervised by Rick Baker.

## FIRST THERE WAS THE WORD

**“Screenwriting is the greatest shitty job in the world,” reflected MIB scripter Ed Solomon, “or the shittiest great job in the world—I don’t know which.”**

thinking that under the Earth was one [great] being and the planet was just a coat for this entity.

“I was trying to get as bizarre as I could, but ultimately reason and budget and practicality sort of overrule you and you end up with a smaller and more manageable group of creatures that you get people to create and hopefully they’re different and unique enough that people won’t feel they’re looking at something that they’ve seen before.”

Also dropped was a draft where humans were actually the real villains of the piece. “You can’t get a group of humans to go see [this type] of movie where they themselves are the villains.

“There’s a lot of stuff that I thought would have been cool in the film, but what happens again with a movie like this is there are so many powerful, creative visions involved, it’s like a large Ouija board, where you sort of gently go with the movement of the piece and as the piece evolves, you have to get rid of the stuff that doesn’t work. We weren’t able to save things that we liked, because it might not necessarily work with the new direction of the film, so we’d have to find new but equal things [that did work].”

While Solomon is philosophical about the changes the script went through (“in a movie like this, where the writer is not the holder of the vision of the film, you get used to not winning [many] script arguments”), the ideas which attracted him to the film originally are still very much in place: “The fact that we don’t know aliens are here and that human beings are not the center of the universe.”

Solomon would love the chance to re-up should a sequel be greenlighted. In the mean-

time, he’s currently working on a spec script, as well as a project with Garry Shandling. (Solomon got his start writing for such comedians as Jimmie Walker and Byron Allen and landed a job writing for the TV series *LAVERNE & SHIRLEY* at the age of 21.) While he hopes to have the chance to direct one of his own projects, he has no plans to abandon his roots.

“Screenwriting is the greatest shitty job in the world or the shittiest great job in the world, I don’t know which.” While the life of a screenwriter may not be for everyone (“My accountant says, ‘Thank god I’m not a screenwriter’”), it suits Solomon just fine. “There’s nothing I like more than a day when I have nothing to do. It’s like clean snow to me. [There are] no tracks and I can just take my time and I spend the whole day writing. I absolutely love it.” □

Solomon cut his cross-country script to one opening desert scene, with the rest of the action in New York.



turistic effects that won’t cost as much money. Then we’re allotted just so many days to shoot and you’ve got to cut some more. The revisions continued quite literally up until the actual shooting.”

In fact, the revisions continued during the film itself. Both Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith would rewrite their own dialogue. And of course there were last minute-changes.

Solomon wasn’t on the set every day. (“Barry made it clear I could come as much as I wanted to”), but was, as he put it, “on-call,” ready to respond to whatever was needed. “By the time the film is in production and all of the elements are in place, my work is mostly done. I’m there [at that point] only to try to fix and patch things that aren’t quite working.”

Solomon also recalled how the question of making the aliens believable to the audience was a major concern from the beginning. “This is one of the areas where a lot of things I originally came up with might have been a bit too ‘conceptual’ for a mainstream audience.” Solomon’s early drafts concern aliens that are any-

thing but “little green men in suits.” His extraterrestrials ran the gamut from beings that were “seven hovering spheres” to one alien that “came before you called him, but would never arrive if you didn’t call him, so even after he arrives you have to call him, because if you didn’t, he never would have arrived.” Many of these ideas were deemed too hard to translate to film and ultimately dropped.

“There’s that famous old joke from [the TV series] *MY FAVORITE MARTIAN* where a studio executive sent a memo to the show’s creative team saying, ‘...change the dialogue. A Martian wouldn’t say that.’ I’m reminded of that, because initially, I tried to think of aliens that would fall into all sorts of different categories. There would be humanoid aliens, there would be ones that were sort of like bugs, there would be aliens that would be sort of like a diaphanous fog, there would be aliens that used gravity completely opposite to the way humans do, there were aliens that used time in a completely different way. Initially I was even



release of some other alien movies, there is a general feeling, voiced by MacDonald, that they are all very glad that this movie was not set in Washington, DC.

Sonnenfeld also felt that *MEN IN BLACK* was ideally suited to be a hybrid of the science fiction and police procedural genres. At one point, he told Steven Spielberg he saw the film as a comic version of *THE FRENCH CONNECTION* where you had the two cops working to solve a crime, only with aliens, and treating it no differently than if they were tracking down a small-time thug.

That attitude of being completely oblivious to all but their job was probably the most important point in the entire development process. This was one of the few concepts the film took directly from the comics. (Solomon, Parkes and MacDonald all note that Cunningham's work was used more as a springboard than anything else.)

Cunningham's MIB attitude was personified in agent "K." World-weary and cynical, a man who's seen it all, "K," who's been with the MIB since it was founded in the early '60s, perfectly fits into the standard formula of the jaded policemen and/or steely-eyed gumshoe. There are numerous scenes in the movie where "K"

Producer Walter Parkes, now chief of Steven Spielberg's Dream Works movie operation, nursed the project.



## DETECTIVE MEETS ALIEN

**“Okay, Mikey, that’s enough. Now put up all your hands and flippers,” Tommy Lee Jones deadpan delivery of the line to an illegal extraterrestrial, drew howls of laughter.**



Vincent D'Onofrio plays villain Edgar in *Makeup* by Cinovation. D'Onofrio's Edgar (l) is a farmer who gets possessed by aliens.

is pursuing his investigation and not reacting at all to the fact that he's dealing with aliens. The first sequence in the film has him arresting Mikey, an illegal extraterrestrial, with the line, "Okay Mikey, that's enough. Now put up all your hands and flippers." It's said with a perfectly straight face, but the absurdity of it all drew howls of laughter at a press screening of scenes last December.

As Sonnenfeld pointed out, "What's funny is never acknowledging 'that put up your flippers' is a funny line. It wouldn't work if he said, 'Okay Mikey, that's enough, put up your hands [pause] and put up your flippers.' Never acknowledge the comedy and then it's funny."

Solomon echoed that point. "What's conceptually important to me was that while [Jones] is shaking down this ridiculous alien, he's also holding what was the alien's fake human head just like it was run-of-the-mill-cop business."

Jones, who gives a hilarious performance in the best deadpan tradition, came on board early on (before Sonnenfeld)

which helped tremendously, as the role of "K" was fleshed out with him in mind. Recalled MacDonald, "We made a deal for him in [1993] and he was great in terms of staying." Lowell Cunningham remembered being ecstatic when he heard the news. "When I heard they were casting Tommy Lee Jones as 'K,' my first thought was, 'Why didn't I think of that?' I just thought it was perfect from the first time I heard about it."

For his inspiration, comic creator Cunningham got to visit the set and make his professional acting debut in a scene at MIB headquarters. "There are these two aliens that kind of look like animated sunflowers called, 'Yin' and 'Yang,'" said Cunningham. "Tommy Lee Jones walks out with Will Smith and says, 'Here are the twins Yin and Yang' and he's explaining how they monitor aliens on Earth. At one point, they're looking up at the screen and [when] they do a reverse shot, I'm walking up the aisle, behind and between them."

If Tommy Lee Jones is the world-weary cynic who's seen it all, Will Smith is the "every-

man" of the piece. A New York City street cop, who thinks he knows how the world operates, Smith is stunned to find out that aliens by the thousands live and work in the city everyday. As Sonnenfeld pointed out, "He's our eyes in the movie and that's why he can play it a bit more like 'What am I seeing? What's going on here?'"

Sonnenfeld also felt that the match-up of the wide-eyed Smith (who didn't come on board till much later in the process) with the deadpan Jones to be a perfect blend. This is best exemplified in one of the early scenes where the two stop at a run-down pawn shop which Smith (who doesn't know what's going on at this point), believes to be a store run by a small-time fence. After Smith chastises Jeeves, the owner, about carrying hot watches, Jones reveals that the man is also trafficking in alien weaponry. After proving, quite dramatically, that Jeeves is not of this Earth, Jones snarls to him "I want you off this rock on the next transport" and storms out. At which point, Smith, who cannot believe what he's seeing, makes a vain attempt to regain control of the situation by stammering that he'll be back to make sure Jeeves isn't selling any more illegal Rolexes.

When asked about the casting of Smith, Cunningham noted he really wasn't familiar with Smith as an actor, but "I knew he did [the TV series] *FRESH PRINCE* and he does some of the only rap music I can listen to." Smith has won several Grammys for his work in music. Other actors up for the role of "J" before Smith was cast included David Schwimmer, Keanu Reeves and Chris O'Donnell.

This juxtaposition of priorities, (stolen watches vs. evil aliens), helped to put another issue into perspective. That humans take themselves way too seriously and the little issues don't really matter when you've got aliens on this planet. MacDonald is quick to point out that this film is pure entertainment and not a "message movie" per se, but does note that "during our lives you get obsessed with the small details, and there is a great way which the movie



# MIB

## THE ALIENS: RUBBER VS. CGI

*Designer Carlos Huante  
on the realism of Latex.*

*By Douglas Eby*

The aliens of *MEN IN BLACK* were the domain of makeup artist Rick Baker, who had to share the stage with the CGI effects aces of ILM. One of the most prominent and busiest special makeup effects artists, Baker has been nominated for six Academy Awards, winning four: for *ED WOOD*, *HARRY AND THE HENDERSONS* and *AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON* and *THE NUTTY PROFESSOR*.

"This was really a fun project, because it had a little bit of everything," said Baker, "make-up, creature suits, mechanical monsters. Usually I'll do a make-up film, or an effects film, and it was a blast to do it all here."

While working with Rick Baker, most of the makeup design work for *MEN IN BLACK* was his creation, noted artist

Carlos Huante. "All except for a couple of incidentals."

The design for one of the main aliens, "Mikey," evolved from something that was "more on the playful side," Huante said, to "more human in a way, but also frog-like. The first design was almost cartoony, but also realistic. That was the first one I came up with. They just described the characters to me real quick, and I had to come up with stuff within a weekend. I just jammed this stuff out, and those designs turned out to be the influence for those characters, and then I had to work on the inspirations I'd received on those for the final designs."

From Huante's design, sculpted as a small maquette, Baker's team crafted a full-body suit, enhanced digitally by ILM. "What you see is a man in the suit, with stilt legs, and switched to a computer-generat-

Aaron Sims paints a maquette of Carlos Huante's design for "Mikey," one of the key aliens, built as a full body suit and later enhanced digitally by ILM.



Cinovation technician Lisa Welton seams the baby alien sculpted by Jose Fernandez. The wide variety of alien designs were a year in development.

ed image, which I think was pretty successful," said Baker. "The guy wearing the suit, John Alexander, I first worked with on *GREYSTOKE*; he's not only an amazing suit-performer, but an incredibly nice guy. You can light him on fire and he doesn't mind. And this ["Mikey"] was one of the most uncomfortable suits I've ever made. I usually can say when I make a suit that I know what they're like, because I've worn them myself, and try to get them as comfortable as possible. This is nothing like that. John is balancing on these stilt legs, his head is inside the neck, which is foam rubber right against his face; his arms are inside arm extensions; he can't see, he can't breathe, can't stand, can't do much of anything, but still managed to do a fun performance."

Another part of Baker's work was making duplicate heads of some of the actors. "We got to do a lot of fun likeness heads, some of the best we've ever done," said Baker. "Though it doesn't show that much in the film, the one of 'Sergio' was completely articulated: the jaw works, the eyes work, and I think it actually came out really looking like the actor."

The team also made a "cute" alien creature for a birth scene "like you've never seen before" said Baker. "Eventually the baby comes out, and has a lot of tentacles, and just as Will Smith is about to fall in love with it, it vomits all over him."

At one point in the production there was a discussion about whether or not to use Huante's design for Edgar, the gruff and abusive farmer,





played by Vincent D'Onofrio, whose body is taken over by an alien. His general human features are retained but significantly modified to indicate this is no longer "just a human." According to decisions by Baker and *MEN IN BLACK* director Barry Sonnenfeld, there were a number of characters, including Edgar, whose final appearance will be some combination of makeup, often heavy latex constructions, and CGI. But that is a decision that Huante (who left the production near the end) questioned: "I don't know what they really wanted to do, why they would go CG," said Huante. "Because CG has no acting; the only acting there depends on how good your animator is, and most of them are technical guys."

Baker and actor Vincent D'Onofrio had worked together before on *ED WOOD*: "He played Orson Welles. In this case, he plays Edgar, a farmer guy whose guts are sucked out of his skin, and is then inhabited by an alien. The first thing I did was to get Vincent out to my studio to try out a lot of make-ups, to get a feel for what we could do, and also get a feel for how willing he was to let us torture him. Like John Alexander, he was incredibly willing. He had been in *FULL METAL JACKET*, playing the overweight guy who ended up blowing his brains out, and he gained, I believe, about 80 pounds for that part, and since losing that he had this loose skin that we could do a lot of fun things with.

"In one scene we glue silk

Director Barry Sonnenfeld (l) prepares to film little green man Mr. Gentle with Cinovation supervisor Baker, popping the head off an autopsied corpse.



## CARLOS HUANTE, DESIGNER

**"There's hardly anyone that knows how to direct monsters and make a really good one. Even *INDEPENDENCE DAY* is an alien invasion movie with no aliens."**



Besides outside designer Huante, the workload of the large number of aliens required led Rick Baker's Cinovation operation to call-in subcontractors to do the work (right), Earl Ellis of ME FX finishes the paint job on an alien body.

slams the thing shut. Barry liked the idea, and we're using it with a character called Mr. Gentle. The little green man is pretty little for us to articulate, so we ended up doing an over-scale version of it."

Sonnenfeld also noted the value of using Baker's "guys in suits." "When you work with ILM, although you will ultimately get what you want, you are now trying to direct a performance with guys who are really good with computers," said the director. "I remember saying to them early on, 'You know, there's a problem here; it looks like a puppet, it doesn't look real.' And they said, 'Well,



records onto his face, and were able to stretch it pretty far, and then morphed it to a constructed face. As Edgar, he continues to decompose throughout the course of the film, so there are many many stages of makeup on Vincent. At one point we used a silicon gel-filled piece, like breast implants are made of, on his neck. Vincent was a lot of fun, and incredibly patient."

Huante lamented the trend for depending on CGI rather than physical effects in sci-fi

and horror films. "There have been no good monster movies in a very long time," he said. "There's hardly anyone who knows how to direct monsters and make a really good one. Even *INDEPENDENCE DAY* had hardly any; it was an alien movie and you barely saw one, you never really saw it. It's an alien invasion movie with no aliens. Then you have *MARS ATTACKS*, which is basically a cartoon. The trouble is, these are going to bring people's expectations down so they won't know what is good anymore. The business guys know those films will make money, so they won't give us the go-ahead to create something really cool anymore."

But Baker hopes to get some "cool" ideas through in *MEN IN BLACK*. Not satisfied with the old idea of depicting an alien by having a character lift up their neck so you see light coming out, Baker suggested to director Sonnenfeld something different: "The guy kind of looks around and his face opens up, and inside there's a little green man working the controls, and he says, 'Hi' and

what do you mean?' And you say, 'It just doesn't look real.' And they reply, 'So you want more secondary muscle movement?' Now on the other hand, ILM's creatures can do things Rick's can't do in terms of physically moving through space, flying and running. ILM was taking their designs off of Rick's models. Neither Rick's [rubber suits etc.] or ILM's creatures would be as good alone as the combination."

Sonnenfeld also noted the general problem of designing alien creatures that don't look like "just another guy in a rubber suit, with two arms, two legs, eyes and a nose. But then, when Rick would design stuff that was far afield from that, I would say, 'Where do you focus on it? How do we know this thing is looking at Tommy? How do you know it's speaking, where is its mouth?' So we were constantly going back and forth to make it something we would accept, and know where to look to understand what was going on, yet different than us. Sometimes it had to be a guy in a rubber suit, but sometimes, like the worm guys [small, vaguely snake-like aliens] they couldn't



exist with any human actors doing it.”

The cases where Sonnenfeld made a choice to not give a creature to ILM, but rather have Baker and his team create it, Sonnenfeld noted it always paid off. “They did it with only a little rehearsal for the puppeteers, and what you see in performance is great,” he said. “When you see the worm guys speaking, they’re hilarious, and if I had to ask computer animators to do that—they’re not funny, that’s not their strength. So I really feel, looking at it in retrospect, to give as much to Rick Baker as possible. But I do want to say that without ILM, we wouldn’t have the movie either; it’s just different sets of experiences.”

Alien designer Huante disagreed with Sonnenfeld’s blended technology approach. Huante feels strongly that “the traditional way of doing things is the best. All this new stuff is cool, but it doesn’t really make any difference. You still have to start on a piece of paper. I don’t think the computer is good for creatures, to be honest. And that’s the problem with a lot of the people in the industry who are in charge; they don’t understand or know how to compose shots with creatures in them to make them look really cool, and you get a lot of bad stuff. They do great technical stuff like spaceships in flight, but then they show a CG monster and it’s like ‘What the heck is that’—they light it too much, they don’t show it properly, they show the wrong parts.” □

Incidental background alien sculpted by Aaron Sims. Designer Huante prefers the look of rubber to CGI.



## MONSTER MAKER HUANTE

**“CGI people in the industry do great things like spaceships in flight, but not a monster—they light it too much, they don’t show it properly, they show the wrong parts.”**



Cinovation puppeteers (top) rehearse the cable controls of tentacled aliens who operate a console work station (r) at MIB headquarters.

kinds of says, ‘the world, the universe is so much bigger than us, you should be able to kind of be imaginative and let go of the little issues.’”

Solomon agreed. “It’s really funny to me how we human beings take ourselves so seriously in the scope of the universe. This self-important notion that humans shall [always reign] as the dominant creatures in the planet and the only thing in the universe is just hilarious.”

This was also a point which Sonnenfeld and production designer Bo Welch keyed on in regards to the outfits (black suits, narrow ties and sunglasses) worn by the MIB. Outfits that haven’t changed since 1961 when the organization was first formed. Sonnenfeld noted that “When they first saw aliens, basically what that said to me was any change in style goes out the window. They wear those sort of black suits and the narrow ties because that’s what they wore in 1961 and it’s like Tommy would say, ‘You’re telling me wide ties are in? Listen I’ve got a really big secret for you, there are aliens on this planet.’ So the whole idea of changing

fads or [changing] anything is of no interest once you’ve seen aliens and once you know they exist.”

It was the chemistry Jones and Smith brought to their characters that made the film come together. As Cunningham pointed out “it just clicked.” And most of the humor came from the opposing ways the two handled the various situations. One of Sonnenfeld’s favorite scenes occurs when Jones and Smith stop an alien couple from trying to leave Earth. While Jones questions the male, Smith goes to the car to check the woman, who’s in labor. Suddenly a tentacle comes out of the vehicle, grabs Smith, throws him against the car and basically starts bouncing him around. The scene is done with Jones talking to the father in the foreground, shot on location in New Jersey, while Smith, standing in front of a blue screen, hooked up to half a dozen wires and pulled this way and that, is fighting for his life against this alien baby, added later via the special effects process.

Sonnenfeld picked up the story, “Eventually they cut to

Will sitting in the car and Tommy getting in and saying, ‘Did anything about that seem unusual?’ meaning not what Will experienced, but why would this alien try to get off the planet.” This alien couple is not alone. It’s established early on that thousands of aliens are suddenly leaving Earth, which



means they know something the MIB does not.

One interesting irony about MIB was quite accidental and in fact, nobody noticed it until well after the movie was shot. In a film about an organization that thrives on anonymity, not one person connected with the project picked up on the names of the leads, Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones. It first came to the attention of the producers when the marketing department was trying to come up with a promotional campaign for the film. “We never thought about the fact that we had cast the most anonymous names you could imagine,” MacDonald recalled with a laugh. “It was funny that it turned out that way.”

**A**nother bonus was the involvement of Steven Spielberg in the project. It was especially joyful for Sonnenfeld, who Spielberg had asked to direct CASPER in 1993. Sonnenfeld had just adopted a baby girl and wanting to spend as much time with her as possible, turned it down. This time he was able to accept. (His



daughter, now three and-a-half, was a frequent visitor to the MIB set.)

As with other members of the creative team, Spielberg came onto the project with his own unique vision and was involved in various stages of script and story development. Many of his suggestions, including those relating to digital technology, and computer animation were worked into the film. But Sonnenfeld's best memory of Spielberg was in his role as "validator." The scene with Smith and the tentacles didn't exist in the script (where it's referred to as "a shakedown scene"). Wanting to inject a little humor into the sequence, Sonnenfeld storyboarded the action that was ultimately used.

"I remember showing it to Steven and him laughing really hard and it not only validated the scene to me in storyboard stage, but I remember the studio feeling the scene wasn't needed and because of Steven's [as well as Parke's and MacDonald's] response, I was able to convince the studio to sort of stick to my guns."

**A**lso on the team were four men who were most responsible for the technical look and tone of the film. Visual effects supervisor Eric Brevig, who described the film as having a "humorous film noir" feel to it; special makeup effects artist Rick Baker, director of

## CREATIVE GODFATHER

**"I remember the studio feeling the scene wasn't needed," said Sonnenfeld, "and because of Steven Spielberg's response, I was able to sort of stick to my guns."**



Tommy Lee Jones as world-weary agent "K" has seen it all, dealing nonchalantly with an infestation of giant alien cockroaches crafted by Cinovation.

photography Don Peterman and production designer Bo Welch. Brevig, who works at Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) came on board in September 1995 (although ILM had been involved with MIB for more than a year previously); Baker signed on about six months before that, while Peterman joined the project in December of 1995.

Welch, who was originally unavailable when first approached and had to pass on the project ("wistfully," he recalled), ultimately joined the same time as Brevig, who had previously worked with

Mikey in maquette form (l) designed by Carlos Huante. ILM's digital enhancement (below) punched-up the action for the opening.

Spielberg on his TV series AMAZING STORIES.

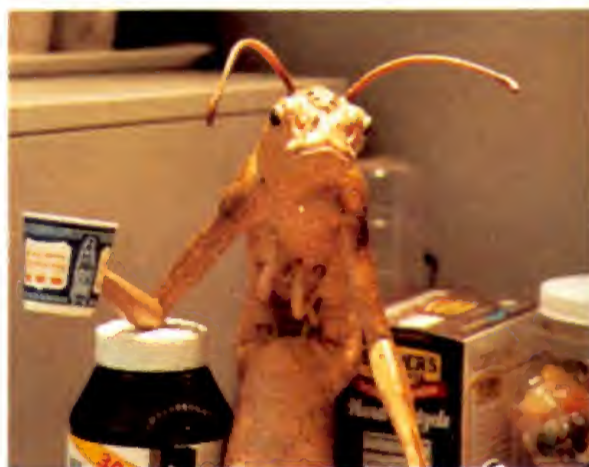
Welch noted that by the time he was on board "they had settled on New York" (as the primary location), but the script was still in a state of flux. They had also decided that the site of the 1964 World's Fair in Flushing, New York, would be the location for the climactic scene of the film. What was not clear, was how the picture would look in terms of design, particularly with the MIB headquarters.

Welch recalled the first draft he saw as describing the headquarters as "a series of small old rooms in an old brownstone where they sort of tore down the adjoining walls to create a kind of a warren of old architecture, typewriters and piles of paper."

Solomon noted the headquarters were originally located in a "very lousy section of Washington." Except for once scene in the MIB gymnasium, the comic books never mentioned it at all. To expand on what was written and to make it more visual for the film, Welch built on the idea of the MIB being founded in the early '60s,

figuring if their fashion hadn't changed since then, neither would their architecture (making allowances for various technological advancements). "I let that be the aesthetic that would kind of govern their design and look."

Sonnenfeld noted the MIB headquarters has a sort of retro '60s look, similar to the TWA terminal at John F. Kennedy International Airport. In fact, like Kennedy, the headquarters serves as an alien customs/immigration center. In Smith's first visit there, Jones takes him past the strangest collection of aliens since the Mos Eisley cantina scene in STAR WARS.



(The center also has a computer showing the location of every alien on Earth.)

Cinematographer Peterman was especially happy with the way the scenes at the MIB Headquarters turned out, crediting his collaboration with Bo Welch as a major factor for his positive experience on the film. ("A lot of times with the director of photography, the production designer is the guy who can really make you or break you.") "The scope of the set was the biggest challenge," said Peterman. "On the Headquarters, we used [something like] 300 lights. We had so much heat at the top of the stage (which was two stories high), we had to get special fans up there [to cool it down]."

Another of Bo Welch's ideas was to have circles everywhere at the HQ, which would represent flying saucers. It was his use of this motif that also helped at another critical juncture during the actual filming. Originally, the chase scene which introduces Smith to the audience was to climax at Lincoln Center. The site had been scouted, the action had been storyboarded, the lighting and





camera crews had gone over the location and everything was ready to roll when Lincoln Center announced it wanted \$1 million for the right to film there. The production company said "no."

Even for a big-budget movie—somewhere between "not low," but "not nearly as high as Hollywood movies go" and definitely "not ultra-budget," according to MacDonald and Parkes—a \$1 million location fee could not be justified. Sonnenfeld agreed with these estimates, noting "they didn't tell me [the actual figure]."

Sonnenfeld recalled sitting in his hotel room after hearing the news about Lincoln Center, when Welch came in and suggested the Guggenheim Museum. "Bo said, 'The Guggenheim looks like a flying saucer, it looks like it belongs in our movie.' It was totally an accident. In fact," he noted wryly, "this is why I don't think directors should be considered the brilliant guys that people think they are."

Another concept Welch worked on, and really enjoyed, was bringing to life the various hardware used in the film. ("I never designed guns before.") In keeping with the '60s feel of the MIB, Welch tried to give everything a monochromatic look. This included the "neuralizer," the most important item in terms of plot. Taken from the comic book, the neuralizer can make people forget everything they have just seen and experienced for the last 10 minutes or the last 20 years. (A handy thing for an MIB to have.) Welch and Sonnenfeld had several conversations regarding the look of the device.

"I talked to Barry and asked him, 'You want the actor to have something big, should it slide into his pocket, should it be worn on his hip, is it bigger than a bread box?' etc." They finally settled on a pen-like device (kind of like the communicator pens used in the TV series *THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.*) "with controls you could adjust for the various amount of time one wants erased and the quantity of people you want to affect."

Welch also designed "The Little Cricket," a tiny gun that

# MIB

## WINGING IT

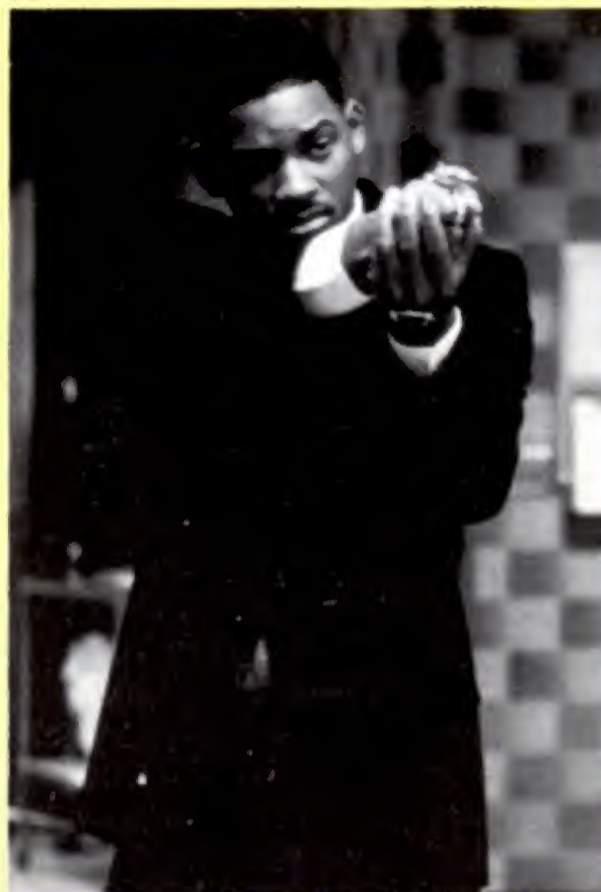
*ILM's CGI capabilities offered the filmmakers freedom to experiment.*

*By Judd Hollander  
& Sue Feinberg*

Ed Solomon's script for *MEN IN BLACK* was often just the jumping-off point for creative changes on the set. As screenwriter Solomon recalled, "It wasn't like the film was in trouble. I've been involved in movies where they're just going like crazy to make it work. This was not the case. Sometimes the actors would go off and ad-lib and they were great at that. They knew their characters and they'd think up a lot of great stuff. I never felt like they're screwing up anything. A lot of people had input. The director, the producers, the actors, all sorts of very good people."

Both Tommy Lee Jones and Will Smith would rewrite their dialogue to better fit their portrayals of the characters they were playing. According to director Barry Sonnenfeld, "Tommy would say, 'Hey Barry, I was looking at the work next week and I think we can cut these three pages down to one. I'm saying this twice, I can lose this...' and Will and his assistant, 'Tron' [played by Ernest Anderson] would often rewrite Will's dialogue.

"[There was] a scene where Will gets into an elevator with Tommy and [Will] says, 'All right, I'm in, 'cause there's some next level shit going on here. But before you beam me up there's one thing you need to know. No one calls me "son" or "slim" or "slick."' The [original] words were not like Will would say them and I remember at wrap the night before, going



Will Smith as "J" fires the little cricket, an MIB weapon with one hell of a recoil, a prop that led to improvisation.

to Will and Tron and saying, 'Guys, the scene we're doing tomorrow, you've got to rewrite it. The call is at 6:00. I'll see you at 5:00 and I want six better versions.'

"And Will and Tron were there the next morning, having rewritten the scene five different ways." The three of them then spent the next hour cutting and pasting the different versions together to get the final product.

Incidents like this can be difficult, but if you have to react to a scene that hasn't even been conceptualized yet, let alone storyboarded, it can be a bit "interesting," to say the least. On Smith's first visit to MIB headquarters, he was supposed to touch a seemingly harmless object (a globe or sphere) which would react violently and hurl him against a wall. However on

the day of the shoot, Sonnenfeld realized they had already planned the same idea, when they would first use the "Little Cricket" (a three- to four-inch gun with the recoil of a cannon). Not wanting to repeat himself, the director came up with the idea of having the ball bouncing through the entire MIB headquarters, destroying everything its path, with everybody reacting to it.

"On the day of the shoot, I said to Will, 'Pretend like there's this floating ball and you touch it and it zooms out and I'll deal with getting Sony [parent company of Columbia/TriStar] to give me more money to shoot the sequence later.' They shot the scene, which had Smith looking this way and that, moving around to avoid getting hit and ad-libbing to action that wasn't there.

"I [told] him, 'All right, look there, look down there, look over there' and at the end of it—I think we did two takes—Will said, 'I think that's the weirdest thing I've ever done. I don't know what I'm looking at. I feel like I'm going to look like a fool.' I said, 'No, no. It's great. It's going to be really funny.'"

What Smith didn't see and what was not even conceived at that point, was the ball crashing around, smashing into various breakable items and sending people (and aliens) diving for cover. So when you see Smith in the scene, saying 'Duck, watch out, get that guy some ice,' it's all ad lib and 'truly, spur of the moment,' as Sonnenfeld put it. All in a day's work on the MIB set. □



## GOLDEN MOVIE OLDIES

**“We’re going to do what twenty years ago would have been a kind of classic Ray Harryhausen battle,” noted effects chief Eric Brevig. “Will fights a giant alien.”**

has the kick of a Howitzer, and the Series 1 Gee Atomizer. Then there was the “sky car” (also known as the “super car” and the “Men In Blackmobile”), which, on the surface, looks like a Ford LTD, but has the ability to drive upside down with two large turbine engines that would spout out of the trunk to drive it along. Other sets that Welch had a hand in designing included a recreation of the New York City morgue where actress Linda Fiorentino (playing Dr. Laurel Weaver) gets to examine the body of an alien, the opening scenes of the American Southwest, which were recreated on a sound stage and the final scenes where Will Smith battles the evil alien Edgar at the site of the World’s Fair.

Parkes happily pointed out that this movie employs “just about every media used in film right now. Animatronics, make-ups, practical effects, mechanical effects, miniatures, computer graphics and computer enhanced shots. Literally everything that people can do right now in film technology is repre-

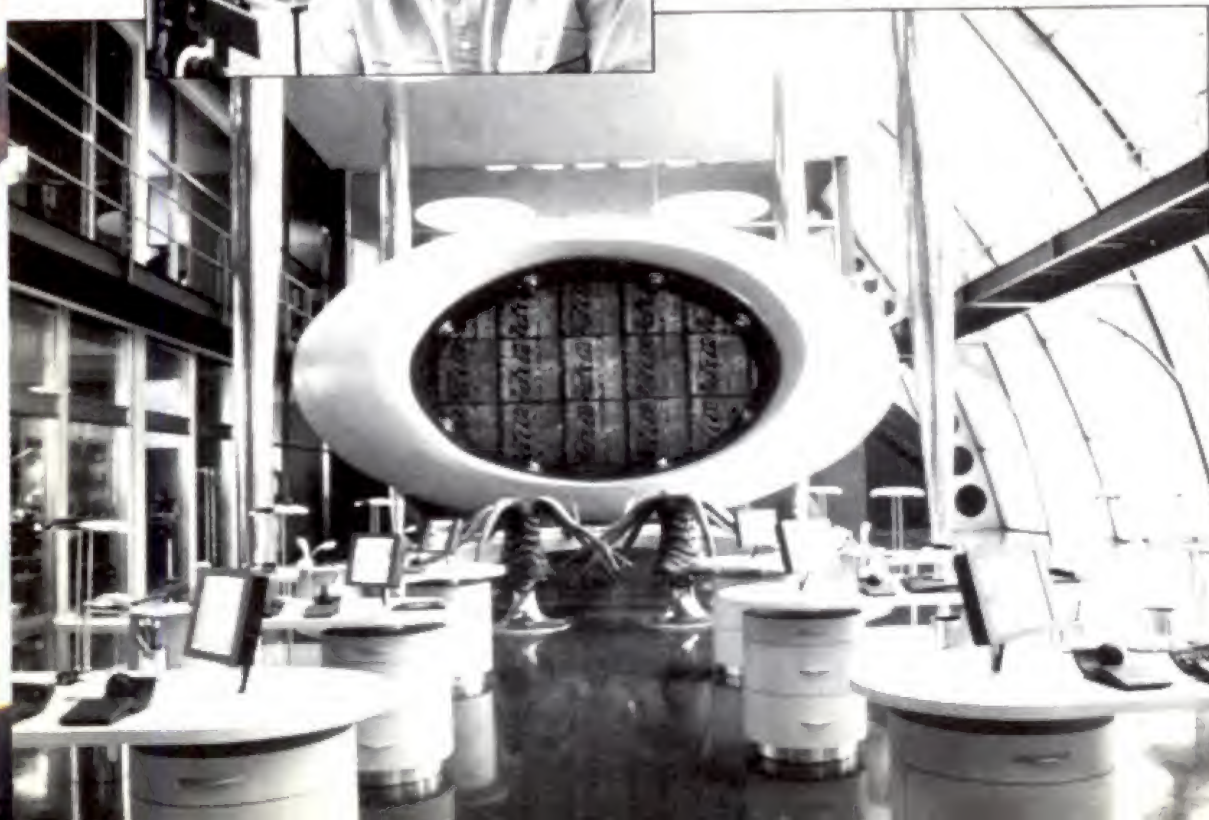
sented in the movie.”

It was the wide range of effects called for in the picture that greatly appealed to Eric Brevig (who was also the second unit director on the film). “I liked the variety,” he said. “There are many individual visual effects or science fiction challenges to design and create.” Brevig noted there are nearly 300 special effect shots in the movie, with almost 30 going into the final scenes.

The end sequence is a battle between Will Smith and a computer graphics creature. “We’re going to do what 20 years ago would have been a kind of classic Ray Harryhausen battle where Will is fighting a giant computer graphic foe and that required me to be there and shoot Will shadowboxing a point in space.” According to Peterman, those final scenes were shot on a stage “150 feet long, trying to make it look like Flushing, which is about 100 yards long. I had my hands full just lighting that scene.”

Many of the shots used required the actors to be photographed in front of a blue screen (by Sonnenfeld) reacting to something that hadn’t even been designed yet. This was

MIB headquarters filmed by cinematographer Don Peterman (l) on Sony soundstages 12 & 13 in Hollywood, the largest in the world.



# MIB

## THE URBAN LEGEND

*The story behind those government agents.*

*By Judd Hollander and Sue Feinberg*

They ride around the country in big, black cars, questioning people who claim to have seen UFOs. They strike fear and terror into the hearts of all who have seen them. And all who have, agree that whatever they are and whomever they represent, they are not human. These are the mysterious “Men In Black” and they are an Urban Legend.

The Men In Black appear to persons who have witnessed UFO-related phenomena or those who are engaged in the study of Unidentified Flying Objects. According to eyewitnesses, they appear seemingly out of nowhere, sometimes posing as members of the military, (such as Army or Air Force and have been dressed in corresponding uniforms), but more often claim to represent a government agency of some sort. They have posed as members of the F.B.I., the C.I.A. and the N.S.A. (National Security Agency). Other times they pose as something as innocuous as journalists or television repairmen.

Almost always the MIB will interrogate their “victim” away from prying eyes. These sessions run the gamut from probing questions, to mysterious statements, to outright threats. When these “beings” depart, it is always with a warning never



UFOologist Alfred K. Bender, father of MIB.

to talk to anybody about what they have seen and essentially forget it ever happened. Often they appear with a knock at the door and when they are finished, they turn a corner and simply vanish.

When they come via their own transportation, it’s always in a long black car, one 20 or 30 years old, but one with an interior which looks and smells like new. Witnesses have reported seeing an “eerie” purplish haze coming from the vehicle’s interior. The license plates are always untraceable.

The general feeling seems to be that whatever the Men In Black are, they are not of this Earth. Their build varies and has been described as ranging from “slight and frail” or “cadaverous,” to “strong” and

Bender’s MIB sketch from his 1962 book *Flying Saucers and Three Men*.





“towering” (over seven feet). They speak in a monotone, with a slow, concise manner, as if they are having trouble adapting to our language. The faces of the MIB are usually described as “foreign” with “oriental” being the most frequent connotation. Their skin is either dark or “very heavily tanned” (although one person described them as having “a very bad sunburn”). Slanted eyes have also been cited as a common characteristic, as well as high cheekbones and a pointed chin. They don’t sweat, eat, drink or show emotion, at least not in the way humans do. However, there always seems to be at least one exception to each rule when it comes to their appearance. Several reports make note of their having glowing eyes and pale, colorless skin; except for the lips which can be bright red, believed to be lipstick.

The first commonly accepted account of MIB activity in the modern era, and one that many credit as starting the MIB Urban Legend, can be traced to a single man—Albert K. Bender, founder of the International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB). The MIB is an atypical Urban Legend in that its history can be traced almost back to a single source. In the October, 1953 issue of *Space Review*, IFSB’s newsletter, Bender announced that not only did he have positive proof of the existence of flying saucers, he had solved the mystery behind their visiting Earth. However, he said he had been warned not to publish this material and cautioned anybody doing their own UFO investigation to proceed with great care in the future. Shortly thereafter, Bender disbanded the IFSB and ceased publication of the magazine.

Although the IFSB (which was supposedly in deep financial straits) had barely 200 members, most of them followed UFO phenomena with a deep fervor. Theories of government conspiracy sprang up almost overnight (remember this was barely six years after the Roswell incident). When questioned, Bender would only say he had been warned to say nothing by “three members



Men in Black have been popularized on NBC’s DARK SKIES (above) and THE X-FILES (right), which parodied ridiculous “factual” accounts of the mysterious figures.

of the United States Government wearing dark suits.” However, nothing inspires conspiracy buffs like a mystery and in 1956 Gary Barker, a member of the IFSB, published a book entitled *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers*, which put forth the theory that Bender’s mysterious visitors were not government agents at all, but actually aliens.

During the years immediately after Bender’s announcement, the MIB fervor was at its height. Rumors of these mysterious individuals kept cropping up in “so-called secret documents” and “investigative committee reports.” In fact the army supposedly took the entire matter seriously enough to issue a statement on the situation. According to UFO investigator John Keel, Colonel George P. Freeman, a Pentagon spokesman for the U.S. Air Force’s “Project Blue Book,” told him during an interview: “Mysterious men dressed in Air Force uniforms, or bearing impressive credentials from government agencies, have been silencing UFO witnesses. We have checked a number of these cases and these men are not connected with the Air Force in any way. We haven’t been able to find out anything about these men. By posing as Air Force officers and government agents, they are

committing a federal offense. We would sure like to catch one. Unfortunately, the trail is always too cold by the time we hear about these cases, but we are still trying.” (Project Blue Book, an Air Force agency set up to investigate UFO sightings, was shut down in 1969 after it was determined there was no basis to conclude there was, or has ever been, any extraterrestrial activity on Earth.)

In 1963, after nearly a decade of silence, Bender published his own book on the subject, *Flying Saucers and the Three Men*. (Apparently the statute of limitations had run out on the original warning he received.) The book, which has been widely slammed as “highly implausible” and “boring,” (in it Bender tells of being taken to the South Pole aboard an alien ship), helped more than anything else to crystallize the image of the Men In Black as mysterious men in dark suits.

Soon there began to appear account after account of MIBs who would suddenly show up at the site of a UFO incident and vanish almost immediately afterward. And these visits were not limited to the United States. Sightings have been reported as far away as China and Australia, with additional reports coming in from Britain, Mexi-

co, Italy and New Zealand. However, upon closer examination, these claims, (like almost all the MIB stories), are almost impossible to pin down or verify in any substantial way.

It is also important to note the era when the MIB legends first sprang to life. Bender’s motives aside, in the 1950s, the Cold War was rampant, the McCarthy



Era was in full swing and theories of government conspiracies abounded. This was the perfect era (indeed, perhaps the only one) from which the Men In Black could emerge. One account from that period of the MIB uniforms describes them as “[similar to] the quilted uniforms worn by Korean and Chinese Troops in the Korean War.” Also, the MIB emerged in a simpler time, when people took more things at face value and where there was no Information Superhighway of computers and data bases linking cities and countries at the touch of a button. 1990 followers of UFOs can ask questions and formulate concepts which someone in 1953 could barely begin to imagine, let alone ask.

There is, of course, no way of knowing for sure just who or what the MIB (who have been accused of being everything from representatives of the Mafia to agents of the Devil) really are. But it’s a fascinating story, one that continues to grow and adapt as time passes and society changes. And it’s a perfect tale for telling around the campfire at night, just before you go to bed. It makes you look up at the sky and wonder; and that’s what Urban Legends are all about. □



# MIB

## THE INSPIRATION

1974's *NIGHT STALKER* paved the way for *MIB* and *X-FILES*.

By Judd Hollander & Sue Feinberg

It's hard to believe that a 1970s television series (rather dated and cheesy-looking by today's standards), with a life span of 20 episodes and two movies of the week, could have been the inspiration for a landmark TV series of the '90s, as well as an upcoming major motion picture. But that's exactly what *THE NIGHT STALKER* was.

Although it ran for less than one year, in 1974-75, *THE NIGHT STALKER* had a lasting effect on Lowell Cunningham. When he first came up with the idea for his *Men In Black* comic, he drew upon his memories of *STALKER* for his inspiration, much in the same way Chris Carter drew upon his for *THE X-FILES*.

"*THE NIGHT STALKER* was one of my favorite shows," Cunningham remembered, "and I've said before I've considered it an influence [in *MIB*] and I know Chris Carter said that about *THE X-FILES*. The way I look at it, Chris Carter kind of mixed *THE NIGHT STALKER* with *THE FBI* [TV series]. *Men In Black* is more *THE NIGHT STALKER* crossed with *THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.*," he noted, referring to the comic's (and the film's) tongue-in-cheek humor.

Created by Jeff Rice, *THE NIGHT STALKER* followed the adventures of Carl Kolchak (played by Darren McGavin), a hard-bitten, trust-no-one, down-on-his-luck, cynical reporter, who kept stumbling in-



Darren McGavin as KOLCHAK: *THE NIGHT STALKER*, the mid-'70s TV series that inspired the *MIB* comics and *THE X-FILES*.

to one supernatural adventure after another. (In a way, Kolchak is a kind of combination of the movie's "J" and "K." One moment he's frightened by a witch or monster, another he's calmly talking to a disciple of the devil or trying to convince a headless motorcyclist he had nothing to do with his death.) And like the comics, there was no limit to the evils Kolchak faced. He fought aliens, but he also battled werewolves, zombies, creatures of legend and even an evil that was, quite literally, "dreamed" into reality.

*THE NIGHT STALKER* might not have made a big impression on enough people to survive the TV ratings wars, but it certainly did with the UFO crowd and various paranormal groups. During the 1970s, UFO fever was at its height (Cun-

ningham recalled neighbors of his who "would come out and try to see the mysterious lights at night") and to those who wondered, "Could there really be something out there," Carl Kolchak, both essentially a nonbeliever [at first] and an "everyman," was there to say "Yes it could."

While there were no "Men In Black" per se in *THE NIGHT STALKER*, the genesis of the legend were present. They were there in the tight-lipped police captains, the heads of giant corporations, the military and even officers on a cruise line. All were people dedicated to hiding the truth from the world, protecting the status quo and who would go to any length to maintain it.

This included censoring the press, framing Kolchak for murder, destroying his equipment (an old-style pocket camera) and even drugging him to erase his memory of certain events.

Although *THE NIGHT STALKER* died a quick and ignoble death in 1975, through syndication airings over the last 20 years, it has developed a healthy cult following. Currently it has found a home on the Sci-Fi Channel. (It's also kept alive through newsletters and fan fiction.) And if Kolchak were still out there somewhere, he would probably prove to be one of the biggest headaches "J" and "K" ever had. For the *MIB* is dedicated to keeping the truth quiet and Kolchak is still after that "one big scoop" that's going to get him the Pulitzer Prize. □

due to the various script revisions which were going on right up to the beginning of principal photography and even after that, to a lesser extent. "A lot of the work that one likes to do in advance was done during principal photography and certain scenes that don't actually intercut with other ones, such as establishing shots and what the *MIB* see on the screen in their headquarters, we're actually designing right now," Brevig noted last December, long after principal photography wrapped.

One of the blue screen sequences takes place when Jones and Smith are speeding toward their final confrontation with Edgar. Their car, which transforms (Welch said it "morphed") and flies through the Queens Midtown Tunnel, just below the ceiling. (Traffic was too heavy down below). In describing the process, Brevig pointed out that "the traffic and tunnel were miniatures and the *MIB* car with Tommy and Will inside of it is a computer graphics transforming car that we're rendering here [at ILM]. We shot Will and Tommy in blue screen and deposited them in the car. So [basically] it's two guys inside of a little rig inside of a blue screen and everything else in the sequence is either a miniature or a computer graphics synthetic car."

Working in blue screen presented Peterman with a unique challenge. "One of the main problems for me is trying to light the background and then when we go to blue screen and put the people in these backgrounds, it has to match, it has to look like the light is coming from the same direction." Pointing to the scene where Smith has to deliver an alien baby, Peterman noted, "I had to light Will Smith [filming in blue screen] to match the day that we were over in New Jersey. I had to figure out where the sun was that day, I took all those reference notes and when we shot him over in blue screen we put the sun, our sun [a big light], in the same position that the sun [originally] was."

Another sequence, involving a tiny alien, combined both the talents of Brevig and Rick Baker. Set in the New York City



morgue, it has the alien popping out of the head of a dead man. Most of these figures were "practical puppets" as Brevig called them, which were created by Baker and his team. Brevig had to photograph the inside of the head, which was actually four feet tall, "shrink it and put in inside a normal person's head." As a result, the finished sequence will show what appears to be a tiny, four-inch puppet, which was in reality three feet in length.

As the various effects were completed, they then had to be inserted in the film, a process Sonnenfeld said was akin to "directing another movie, but instead of actors, you're working with computer technicians." Since Sonnenfeld had his offices on the East Coast and ILM was on the West Coast, much of the editing (with Brevig and others) was done long distance via a video phone that was linked by fiber optic cables. (Much in the same way the broadcast networks sent out their television shows.) Sonnenfeld noted, "We'd have three or four-hour video conferences, twice a week. I can see them, they can see me. And on another screen, we see the videotape of what they're doing." Noted Brevig, "It's very live and very interactive." (Both control a cursor that lets them point out specific frames or shots).

**W**hen working on a movie like this, the inevitable question of a sequel comes up. All agree it's quite possible al-

#### DIRECTOR SONNENFELD

**"MIB implies aliens are here and have been for a long time. I want you to look at those weird people you've always wondered about and say, 'Now I have an explanation.'"**



Mr. Gentle, Cinovation makeup supervisor Rick Baker's take on the little green man pulling the strings, revealed as the punchline gag to an autopsy.

though Parkes was a little hesitant on the subject. ("That's the kind of question that damns movies to failure.")

Sonnenfeld, on the other hand, thinks a sequel would quite probably be better than the original. "[While making the movie] we discovered what works and [that's] the relationship between Tommy and Will and playing New York for the

fact that these aliens are out there and sort of blending or badly attempting to blend in. I think this screams for a sequel."

He goes on to say they already know what the first scene of the second movie will be. That is of course if there is a sequel; being wise to the ways of Hollywood, Sonnenfeld knows full well the question of a sequel depends solely on how the film fares at the boxoffice, and that can be a tougher battlefield than any alien invasion imaginable. Which is probably why, when Parkes was asked what he hopes people will take with them after seeing the film, he replied, tongue firmly in cheek, "A burning desire to see it again."

Ask the same question to Sonnenfeld and he'll go back to what appealed to him in the first place. "We see a lot of the other alien movies, [where]

we're all happy on Earth, then something comes down and threatens us, but what I liked so much about [MEN IN BLACK] is that it implies that aliens are here and have been here for a long time. And [you may] say, 'What's gotten into this guy, why is he walking down the street with that stupid shirt on backwards and his underwear on the outside?' Well, he's just new to the planet and he didn't know the underwear goes on the inside.

"What I want to happen is when the audience leaves MIB, as they walk out of the theater and past the line of people waiting to get into the next performance, that someone sort of elbows their friend or their date and points to someone on line and says, 'There you go, there's Rojack or there's Mikey or Jeeves.' I want them to sort of look at those weird people that you've always wondered about and say, 'Now I have an explanation.' That's my hope—and I just want them to laugh a bit and be entertained."

To which Laurie MacDonald added, "The movie's really appropriate for a wide age, which, as a mother, I'm very happy about. It should play well to children. I think it's something they can see, but I think it remains sophisticated, which I think is fun." □

Smith drags a felon to justice, the MIB always gets their man—er, alien—thanks to superior fire power.

Screening MIB candidates, saucer-like pools of light used by production designer Bo Welch (r) to accentuate the UFO theme.





# BATMAN & ROBIN

**A lighter, brighter Batman, from the BATMAN FOREVER team.**



Chris O'Donnell returns as Robin the Boy Wonder, with an expanded role, restyled costume and Batgirl as a sidekick, played by Alicia Silverstone.

*By Craig Reid*

After the frazzled success of *BATMAN RETURNS* and the contention that the tone of the series was becoming too dark, Warner Brothers essentially handed over the keys to the kingdom of their dynamic duo to producer Peter MacGregor-Scott and director Joel Schumacher. *BATMAN FOREVER* was the result in 1995, and now Schumacher and MacGregor-Scott are weighing-in with *BATMAN & ROBIN*, which opens nationwide June 20.

The English-accented rugby fan MacGregor-Scott recalled, "I had just finished *THE FUGITIVE* with Andy Davis and it was a big hit. I was in England at the time and the president of the studio happened to be in London and asked if I'd like to do a *BATMAN*. I said I'd love to. Next thing I know I'm flying to Mississippi to meet with Joel Schumacher. He asked me why I wanted to do it and I said, 'At the end of the day on your tombstone, you can only put so many pictures, and *BATMAN* would really look good on it.'

"It just sounded like a fun project. I had no idea how big and how complicated it would be. But it certainly seemed a great challenge. Joel is a self-described pop culture sponge, and so he was the perfect choice as director."

Director extraordinaire

ER's George Clooney is an imposing, manly-k

Schumacher added, "I was lucky to be chosen. I was filming *THE CLIENT* at the time and was asked to fly in for breakfast where I was asked. My first reaction was a childhood reaction because I was born the same year Batman was created, 1939, and I grew up being a fan of Batman and not Superman. I must admit having never done anything this big before. I was very naive about the





Looking Batman, but one that director Joel Schumacher feels still maintains approachability.

size of the responsibility, first to the fans, the expectation level of the audience and to the franchise itself. It's different from *THE CLIENT* or *A TIME TO KILL*, where the responsibility is to the film period."

Their first collaboration, *BATMAN FOREVER* grossed \$183.9 million domestically, and Schumacher and MacGregor-Scott have already started working on 1999's *BATMAN*

5. They not only brought fresh boxoffice life to the series but also reinvented the character, replacing the brooding look forged by Tim Burton with a more accessible, less agonizing, lighter character.

Noted MacGregor-Scott, "Showing his parent's death in the third movie was the [key], the young boy walking into the alley. We felt we had serviced the dark side with his parent's

**“It was time for Batman to stop brooding over the loss of his parents. ...it was incumbent for Batman to mature and become more concerned about others.”**

death and his struggle to come to terms with it so it was unnecessary to deal with it in this film. Basically, where we left off with the last one is the beginning of this one."

The big difference in *BATMAN & ROBIN* is the introduction of George Clooney as Batman, replacing Val Kilmer, who wanted out of the costume after *BATMAN FOREVER*. "His chin is a little squarer than the previous Bats," said MacGregor-Scott of Clooney, "but he has strong lips and looks great in the new suit. He's more accessible, and by that we mean that the audience can look at him and feel like they can approach him and talk to him. Batman is human, not superhuman. He's just a regular human being who wears a rubber suit at night and [laughing] the nice thing about him is that he can fix his own wounds due to his ER experience."

Schumacher liked the figure Clooney cut in costume. "George does have an extraordinary nose," said the director. "When I look at the comics he looks more like Batman than Michael [Keaton] and Val [Kilmer]. They were both great as Batman but George is the best, and not because he is my choice. There is something very manly about him and he also has brought a humanity to the piece and that's important. When you look at him you feel immediately safe, plus it was time for Batman to grow up and to stop brooding over the loss of his parents. There is a certain narcissism and selfishness to constantly brood about yourself and although Batman was created in 1939, this is 1997 and it was incumbent for Batman to mature and become more concerned about others."

Over the years *Batman* creator Bob Kane has introduced us to a wild menagerie of ultracolorful characters. Born in the

Bronx, New York, he began his professional career drawing funny fillers for the short-lived "Wow!" comic book and later collaborated with fellow teenager and writer friend Bill Finger in 1939 to invent a new hero, "The Bat-Man." Although Kane retired from comic books in 1966 he still remains committed to his creation as evidenced by his frequent appearances on the set of *BATMAN & ROBIN*. Kane was said to have approved of the spin Schumacher put on Batman's latest frigid foe, Mr. Freeze.

"Joel had always thought that Mr. Freeze would be exciting to do," said MacGregor-

**Dr. Victor Fries (Schwarzenegger), pines for the lost love of his cryogenically preserved wife.**







## UMA THURMAN, POISON IVY

*The Caped Crusader's  
sexiest lethal villain.*

By Frederick C.  
Szebin

After such successes as PULP FICTION and THE TRUTH ABOUT CATS AND DOGS, Uma Thurman is now featured in BATMAN & ROBIN as one of the Caped Crusader's sexiest and most lethal villains, Poison Ivy, Queen of the Plant Kingdom. Rewriting comic book history just a tad, her right-hand man in her war on the planet's interlop-

Poison Ivy also enlists his aid in destroying Batman and spreading the peace of plant life to the four corners of the world.

Thurman almost passed over her chance to play what is probably the most unique character of her career when she thought director Joel Schumacher was going to offer her the role of Bruce Wayne's girlfriend, a part she was not the least interested in accepting.

"I figured there are not many female villains to introduce," said Thurman, "and I didn't know that the role would be something as delectable as a villainess part. At the time, I had no interest in running away from villains and being involved in fighting evil like the caped crusaders. When Joel and I had lunch I said, 'Look, if you're here for a damsel in distress, let's just part ways. But if it's a villain, I'd really like to talk about it.' He said, 'Well, it is a villain. Her name is Poison Ivy,' and we just had a great conversation after that."



Left: Thurman as Poison Ivy. Above: Poison spreading her love dust, which can put any man under her spell. Like any good Batman villain, Poison just loves being wicked.

ing humans is Bane, the drug-pumped super villain who almost killed The Bat in the famous "Knight Fall" storyline.

In the film, Bane is a smitten wrestler who will do anything to help his unrequited love's dream come true: to destroy humanity and wrap the Earth in a cloak of thriving plant life that, in Poison Ivy's mind, will be a new Eden. Impressed with the icy powerhouse of Mr. Freeze,

The nature of most BATMAN villains is their dual personalities, giving an actor a chance to play actually two roles: the law-breaker's normal persona and their wildly-dressed polar opposite. Poison Ivy was born in epic tradition as botanist Pamela, hard at work in her lab melding breeds of poisonous plants and animals to create a generation of plants that would be powerful enough to





Thurman as Dr. Pam Isley, with Clooney as Bruce Wayne. Thurman, who thought she wouldn't be offered a villain part, found the role very enjoyable.

fight back against the ravages of man. But when her wicked compatriot Dr. Woodrow's lustful advances are ignored, he tosses Pamela into a pit filled with poisonous snakes and plants. She emerges from this nightmare with poison in her veins and a stronger view of what the world through her eyes should be.

Thurman didn't know anything about the character she would be playing, but fell into the thrill of her dual Pamela/Poison Ivy role to the point of regretting leaving one of the characters behind when it was time to change costumes. "When I started shooting," she noted, "we began with Pamela's scenes and I got so happy with her. She wears thick glasses and is completely unkempt and unruly, totally unaware of herself. I got so used to that. I thought, 'Oh, I hate having to go to this glamour-puss kind of dragon lady, Poison Ivy. I'm enjoying Pamela so much.' And then once I got into the Poison Ivy role, I started to really find that character and enjoyed her much more."

With previous roles in such mainstream dramatic and comic productions as *MAD DOG AND GLORY*, *BEAUTIFUL GIRLS*, *JENNIFER 8* and *HENRY AND JUNE*, Thurman found the biggest challenge of entering the histrionic world of masked crime fighters being "just trying to find a style for Poison Ivy, a way for her to be and commit to it fully. The costumes are hard to wear, and it was a long shoot. It's difficult to hold a character together working like that. Basically, the great thing about having such a delightfully written

character is that no matter what else is going on, when you actually go to work, you're met by a role that is strong, encouraging and a lot of fun."

Thurman worked with a voice coach to get Ivy's tonal qualities to the proper pitch of evil and sensuality, but it was a comment from her director that really helped the actress nail her part. "When we first met," she recalled, "he said, 'You know, the great thing about the *BATMAN* villains is that they love themselves. They don't feel bad at all about what they are doing. They think their plans are good ideas.' That was a nice discovery for me, to find out that there aren't any great neuroses to work out with *BATMAN* villains."

"I think it's fun to play extremes—the extreme hubris and self-confidence and sense of personal power that Poison Ivy has is not something you'll come across in any normal role," Thurman continued. "It's completely unreal and superhuman, and that's sort of fun. It's such a broad color. I could never imagine playing such a character in a normal dramatic film. It would take a very extraordinary character in some real life setting with some specific reason to engage such vanity as Poison Ivy has. It's not just about how she looks, and she looks extraordinary in the way the make up artists and costume designers created her. But it's her sense of humor that was really appealing about her to me, her sort of cavalier love of wickedness and her naughty, vicious, insatiable desire to cause trouble that made the part so much fun for me." □

**“I needed Arnold to be a threat...” said Schumacher. “I would always tell him he’s ‘the Terminator meets the Refrigerator.’”**

Scott about the choice of villains. “So sitting around between shots on *BATMAN FOREVER* we would talk about Mr. Freeze and that there was only one guy to play him. Arnold Schwarzenegger.”

Noted Schumacher, “This film has probably the biggest action star in the world as a villain. I purposely chose Arnold. Actually the clearest image of Mr. Freeze is Otto Preminger, who is also German. Not speaking ill of the dead, Mr. Preminger doesn't have a pretty face but had an assertive wit. Arnold, besides being a threatening force, is funny, and that was important. Furthermore, the villains love being evil and the *Batman* villains are delicious and have always been played deliciously. I needed Arnold to be a threat and what greater threat to Gotham City than Arnold Schwarzenegger wearing a 70-pound iron suit with a gun that could freeze you. I would always tell him he's 'the Terminator meets the Refrigerator.'”

Schumacher also envisioned Uma Thurman as “delicious” in her role as co-villain Poison Ivy. “Her weapons are her beauty, allure and a kiss to die for,” said Schumacher. “Uma as this villainess provided that action part where *Batman* and *Robin* are lead around by the nose by a gorgeous woman. I think Uma is a timeless beauty, like Garbo and Dietrich. Not just a pretty face or a look of the moment. A timeless beauty. But none of that works unless she has talent. Uma is an extraordinary person—25, six feet tall with one of the most beautiful bodies and faces in the world, but also a great actress and brilliantly funny. It's a rare combination.”

MacGregor-Scott noted that Akiva Goldsman's script is faithful to Kane's concept of the villains in the comics. “Mr. Freeze lives in a zero environment, borne out of an experiment gone awry when he was

Dr. Victor Fries,” said the producer. “His freezing environment is powered by diamonds so he is on a quest to steal larger and larger diamonds to get more power. His back story is that he is trying to save his wife from a rare disease called MacGregor Syndrome [he laughed, slyly], so he has her in a reduced heart-rate in a cold environment waiting to find a cure as he also awaits funding for his research to find that cure. Poison Ivy, the former botanist, Dr. Pam Isley, gets pushed into a large compost heap of snakes and venoms created from her botanical research. She gets infected and her blood turns to venom so when she kisses you, you die.”

Schumacher noted that he attempted to counterbalance the larger-than-life heroes and villains in his direction. “Underneath all of this we try to have reality,” said Schumacher. “The reality in this movie is that there is a very basic movie about family and trust which has to do with Bruce [Wayne] and Alfred,

Warner Bros. *Batman* brain trust: Director Joel Schumaker (l); Screenwriter Akiva Goldsman; and producer Peter MacGregor Scott (r).







## AKIVA GOLDSMAN SCREENWRITER

*BATMAN & ROBIN* scripter on *LOST IN SPACE*.

By Craig Reid

BATMAN & ROBIN screenwriter Akiva Goldsman is currently stationed in London as he prepares to produce and write New Line Cinema's feature version of the "high camp," "danger, danger" sci-fi cult classic television show, *LOST IN SPACE*.

Born in Brooklyn Heights, New York, the son of two prominent child psychologists who worked with autistic children and who founded the Blueberry Treatment Centers, Goldsman initially emulated his parents' background but then eventually walked his own path and earned a graduate degree in creative writing from New York University. A course in scriptwriting with Robert McKee led to writing and placing a spec script with a friend at ILM, filmed as *SILENT SPRING*. Recalled Goldsman, "A friend of mine, Lorenzo Di Bonaventura, who was a creative executive at Warner Brothers, now

**BATMAN FOREVER** and **BATMAN & ROBIN** scripter Akiva Goldsman.



Akiva Goldsman is currently working on *LOST IN SPACE* in London, producing and writing New Line Cinema's big-budget update of the TV series of the '60s.

president at the studio, read it, liked it and introduced me to Joel Schumacher, who was in the process of prepping *THE CLIENT*. That script needed further work, so he hired me."

A believer in the traditional approach to screenwriting, the three-act structure, Goldsman offered his own theory of what needs to happen in his screenplays. "I know that something has to happen on page one, 30, 60, 90 and 120, and each [moment] has to be bigger than the one before. If being bigger visually has more impact, then it has to be bigger visually, or if being bigger emotionally has more impact then it has to be bigger emotionally. It is a very small moment but has tremendous emotional impact. You see, it is not the size but the power of the moment that makes it triumphant."

Goldsman thinks an underlying philosophy of life enters his screenwriting on an unconscious level. "If I were to, in re-

spect, try to glean something that is common in most of my scripts, it is that nothing is more important than the relationships people form with each other and that is the engine that drives all stories and all living. For me, it's human emotion and relationships first, and everything else follows."

Just as the *Enterprise* was recommissioned to once again travel the realms of outer space, (its five-year mission has definitely been trapped in a time warp), another famous space-faring craft awaits its orders to also blast into nostalgic notoriety, the *Jupiter 2*. For those of you who remember the show *LOST IN SPACE*, you know it quickly warped from a serious sci-fi genre piece into a frustratingly GILLIGAN ISLAND-ish farce as fixated through the eyes of the bumbling, whining Dr. Smith. Goldsman noted his version will be far different—better, that is.

"Think about it, William

Hurt as John Robinson and Gary Oldman as Dr. Smith. This is the real version, meaning when Dr. Smith says, 'The pain, the pain,' he means it, or when he says, 'We are doomed,' you will get scared.

"I am very excited about this and it is really fun. As a kid it was my favorite show. I would make these fake plastic control panels and pretend I was in the spaceship. But the truth is, *LOST IN SPACE* became high camp. But if you look into your heart, what you loved about it was not the high camp at all. What you loved about it was the idea of a family in space. We are making a very sci-fi adventure version of this movie. I like to think of this like what Nick Meyer's *STAR TREK* movie was to the series. *STAR TREK* was a much more superior series to *LOST IN SPACE*, nevertheless, there was a kind of real revisionist grounding of the show in the movies. Suddenly everything that was there suddenly made sense in a way that felt tremendously authentic and this is what I believe we are doing here. Like with *BATMAN*, it is just a wonderful chance to live the adventure of a great story, something from my childhood."

For aspiring screenwriters who feel it is impossible to break into the loop, Goldsman offered these final words of advice. "The first thing you have to know is that you can do it. What is more important than talent, luck and connections, is perseverance. Just write, write, and write to develop your skills so you will be ready and available for luck and when the connections are made." □



**“The first film gave us a chance to learn how to do it and to earn the right to do it again,” said Goldsman. “...I’m excited how BATMAN & ROBIN fits together.”**”

and Dick Grayson and Barbara Wilson, who is the ward of Alfred, Batman and Robin and a very emotional story that is going on with Alfred in the house.”

The man responsible for weaving all the plots, subplots, themes, characters, emotions and storylines into a cognizant, understandable, literary format was the film’s screenwriter, Akiva Goldsman. Although coming on midway through the development of *BATMAN FOREVER*, Goldsman and Joel Schumacher literally put together the story for *BATMAN & ROBIN* at the end of a scouting mission for Schumacher’s *A TIME TO KILL*.

Recalled Goldsman, “When Joel and I were on a location scout, the preliminary calls for the exhibitor screenings of *BATMAN FOREVER* came in and were really positive so Joel looked at me and said, ‘God, they are going to want another one.’ So when we were on the plane coming back to Los Angeles we wrote up the story right there on the plane ride and during the filming of *A TIME TO KILL* we spent Sundays talking through the stories, figuring out the rhythms, beats and plots. I then returned to LA for the last month of shooting

time for *A TIME TO KILL*, and wrote a draft; then we worked on it from there. There were eventually three solid drafts.”

Knowing that Arnold Schwarzenegger was going to play Mr. Freeze didn’t affect Goldsman’s take on the material. “I try to write without actors in mind,” said Goldsman. “I think that’s better that way. You can try to imagine the character



as fully as you can. Actors are great at what they do because they can be inhabited by or can inhabit others. It’s not giving them their due if you try to write for what you think they should sound like. Why not write the character and let them inhabit it and if then something doesn’t work then you change them? Arnold is known for action movies and is tremendously intelligent and one of the most committed actors I have ever



Clooney, the best of the Batmans according to director Joel Schumaker. And he’s still equipped with the “best toys”: (l) the design for a hand-held buzzsaw.

worked with. He was so committed to the dialogue. He made every line sound natural as if he owned them, and as if they were coming from his heart.

“Because Joel and I worked on this from scratch the writing process was different than on *BATMAN FOREVER*. It felt more organic. The first film gave us a chance to learn how to do it and to earn the right to do it again. *BATMAN & ROBIN* works at the level it needs to work at visually, viscerally, intellectually and emotionally. I’m really proud of the emotional story at the heart of *BATMAN & ROBIN* because it is about Bruce’s love for Alfred and his fear of losing him. It’s a Batman story that isn’t about, directly, the loss of his parents. There is indeed an emotional true line that works with the villains, that all of them are obsessed by relationships and love, so I’m excited how *BATMAN & ROBIN* all fits together.”

Part of the visual imagery that separates Schumacher’s Batman from Burton’s is the liberal use of neon-lights, and

deep saturated colors in making Gotham City a colorized dark city that borders on a quasi-de-ranged smoldering City of Oz where florid hues and wax crayon-like sheens dot the cityscape with steel plated tones. But *BATMAN & ROBIN* not only offered production designer Barbara Ling the opportunity to do things that she wished she had done on *BATMAN FOREVER* but since this film had

Alfred the butler, played for a fourth time by Michael Gough, has a more important role in *BATMAN & ROBIN*.



Director Joel Schumaker (l) confers with Batman comic creator Bob Kane, a frequent visitor to the set who enthusiastically approved of the team’s decisions.





over 90 sets, she designed the characters and their worlds first.

"The villains, Mr. Freeze and Poison Ivy, are the newest elements in this film so we first slashed out their worlds piece by piece which we could use to create a new version of this era," said the designer. "It is always important to see other sides of what exists, so now we could go back and create a new version of Gotham City, because it is a never-ending city with endless corners and areas that you can keep discovering. This time we can see a lot of waterfronts and rivers which with the character of Mr. Freeze. The overall image of the city is that it is very bombastic, a sort of World's Fair look but ten times the size of that.

"After a movie you always say, 'God, if only I could do it again, I would have done this.' This film gave us that opportunity [after *BATMAN FOREVER*]. This time we gave the city a more sweeping scape and did that by having a greater scope of miniatures. I started with the miniatures so we could have enough time to shoot them for [effects supervisor] John [Dykstra]. Plus, this city is ten times larger. To bring that scope out we have this wild rooftop car chase that goes up and down the buildings and over the roofs. It was also great to get another

continued on page 43

Dispensing with the darkside: Wayne, in flashback, visits his parents' grave; Batman finally starts to move on.



## CHRIS O'DONNELL, ROBIN, BOY WONDER

*Returning to Gotham City after  
a BATMAN-sized career boost.*

*By Frederick C.  
Szebin*

Returning for another swing as Robin, the Boy Wonder is Chris O'Donnell, who scored such a hit with *BATMAN FOREVER*, that he raised his salary into six figures after his first go in the tights. O'Donnell admitted to enjoying the character, although the accouterments leave something to be desired.

"I have to wear the suit a lot more than I did in the last one," said O'Donnell. "In *BATMAN FOREVER*, he gets the high-tech suit at the end of the movie. I only had to wear it for a few scenes. For this movie, I'm in the suit in every scene. That thing is the worst! I hate wearing it. The last one was much easier to get into because this one has a neck piece that you have to pull over your neck, then they glue it on. Once you're in it, you're in it for a little while. It kind of pulls my shoulders back. I can't move and I sweat like crazy. It's a little tight."

The look of O'Donnell's costume created quite a stir in the previous film. "George [Clooney] was kidding me about tipping the costume person," joked O'Donnell. "Well, you know...some of us have bigger cod pieces than other members of the cast, and there's a little jealousy there."

As the title suggests, Dick Grayson's alter ego is more important to this installment of the cinematic *BATMAN* saga than in the previous episode. He's got his own arsenal thanks to the



O'Donnell's costume in *BATMAN FOREVER* proved all men are not created equal—prompting plenty of kidding from Clooney.

Red Bird, a souped-up motorcycle O'Donnell refers to as "a pretty serious piece of equipment. [Director] Joel [Schumacher] was giving me a hard time because, as you know, I crashed the Batmobile last year. He was preparing the crew in case I crashed the Red Bird, but that did not happen!"

Coming onto a sequel where he already knew the director and much of the crew was fun for the actor, but he felt seeing George Clooney in a role that had belonged to Val Kilmer in the previous film was a bit strange. But Clooney and his famous—or infamous depending on what end of it you're on—sense of humor helped O'Donnell make the transition from Val to George.

"George is one of the funnest actors I've ever worked with," said O'Donnell. "He treats the crew real well, and the guy's got more stories than anybody I've ever talked to. I don't know if he makes up some of the things [O'Donnell laughed], but the stories get pretty ridiculous. I had a great time working with Val. I know there's been a lot of talk about how certain people got along with him, but I had no problem with Val. I do think that on a personal level, I do get along even better with George, just because we have more things in common. We both play a lot of basketball, a lot of golf—he's like one of my fraternity brothers, or something. He's just a lot of fun to hang out with. He doesn't have to be intense between takes. He just hangs out and goofs around.

"We played a lot of basketball on the set during lunch. Dean Cain always showed up to play too, so we'd have all the superheroes out on the basketball court, Batman, Robin and Superman."

But O'Donnell learned that Clooney was serious—and smart—about costume work. "He got to the wardrobe people before I did and had looser costumes and half costumes made so that he didn't always have to put on the whole suit," said O'Donnell. "I never got around to that. So I'm gonna have to go to him now for advice on the next one.

Added to the mix this time around is Batgirl, played by Alicia Silverstone from *THE*





O'Donnell in *BATMAN & ROBIN*. The hot, constricting costume required a neckpiece to be *glued* on, with the actor in it—a fact O'Donnell did not relish.

**“When you’re doing a movie so outrageous,” said actor Chris O’Donnell, “like you’re imagining you’re flying through the air—you’ve gotta act like an idiot.”**

Kilmer, nothing quite prepared O’Donnell for the likes of Schwarzenegger.

“He’s like a machine,” O’Donnell marveled. “He just goes non-stop. He works out, acts in the film, runs his businesses. I wouldn’t mind having the side businesses, like restaurants or something, but I would never want to be famous to that level. That’s insane. As huge as he is, I think Arnold has control of his own life. He certainly keeps his family life very private. You get people like Michael Jackson, who, I think, wants to be in the tabloids every day, who are just nuts.”

As seen in *BATMAN FOREVER*, director Joel Schumacher prefers a less dark portrayal of the Caped Crusader and his exploits. That M.O. is carried over into *BATMAN & ROBIN* as the duo goes for light humor and more of a fun, rather than an oppressive, atmosphere.

“This film was actually a lot easier for me to make for a lot of reasons,” said O’Donnell. “One of the biggest is that when I made the last one I was going to night school, finishing up college four nights a week and I was so exhausted from doing that. I’d work 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on the movie, then go to school until 10:00 at night. So, I didn’t have

to do it this time, which made production a lot easier. I’d just come off doing two films back to back and was pretty tired. It’s really nice when you do a film like *BATMAN & ROBIN* at the studio, because everything you need is right there. You know where you’re going every day. You get into a routine, which you normally don’t do on a film, and that makes life a lot easier.”

Unlike his *BATMAN FOREVER* co-star, O’Donnell found the idea of reapproaching his role appealing, if only while thinking about the bottom line. “*BATMAN FOREVER* was a huge boost to my career,” he said. “A lot of this business involves what films make money and give you international exposure. I had been in a number of successful films, but until I did *BATMAN FOREVER*, I was never recognized the way I was after I did that film. That’s a good thing. Robin isn’t the most challenging role I’ve ever played, obviously, but it’s as much fun as I’ve ever had in a film.

“You begin to take it for granted, because when you’re doing it day in and day out you get sick of putting the suits on; you’re hot, sweating, exhausted from doing this and that. But once you stand back and think about it, it’s a great job.” □

CRUSH, CLUELESS and various Aerosmith videos. Since they had a lot of scenes together, Silverstone would turn to O’Donnell for guidance in the controlled chaos that is action filmmaking.

“She’s never done an action film like this,” said O’Donnell about his shapely co-star. “Sometimes it would get so crazy on the set and they’d be throwing out instructions. She’d be like, ‘What am I doing?’ I’d say, ‘Just jump and yell.’ She’d just jump and yell, and it would work perfectly. It can get confusing because there are 1,000 people giving you instructions; you’ve got the stunt guy saying, ‘Ok, this harness is gonna pull you up this way,’ then you’ve got the lighting guy saying, ‘You

don’t want to move your light here. Get out of your light here,’ and then you’ve got Joel giving you directions, as well as the assistant director. It’s a madhouse. She would always look at me like, ‘What are we doing?’ I’m like, ‘Just kick the door open.’ When you’re doing a movie that is so outrageous—like you’re imagining you’re flying through the air or something—you’ve just gotta act like an idiot! [O’Donnell screamed] You just yell because it’s so unnatural.”

One cast member who was well-versed in the workings of explosions, flying co-stars and larger-than-life characters was Arnold Schwarzenegger, appearing as Mr. Freeze. Despite having worked with such superstars as Gene Hackman and Val

Robin, Batman, and Batgirl, battling Mr. Freeze. O’Donnell helped action-film novice Alicia Silverstone, showing her the ropes as she played Batgirl.







# SCHWARZENEGGER MR. FREEZE

*The Terminator takes his role as ultracold scientist seriously.*

*By Frederick C. Szebin*

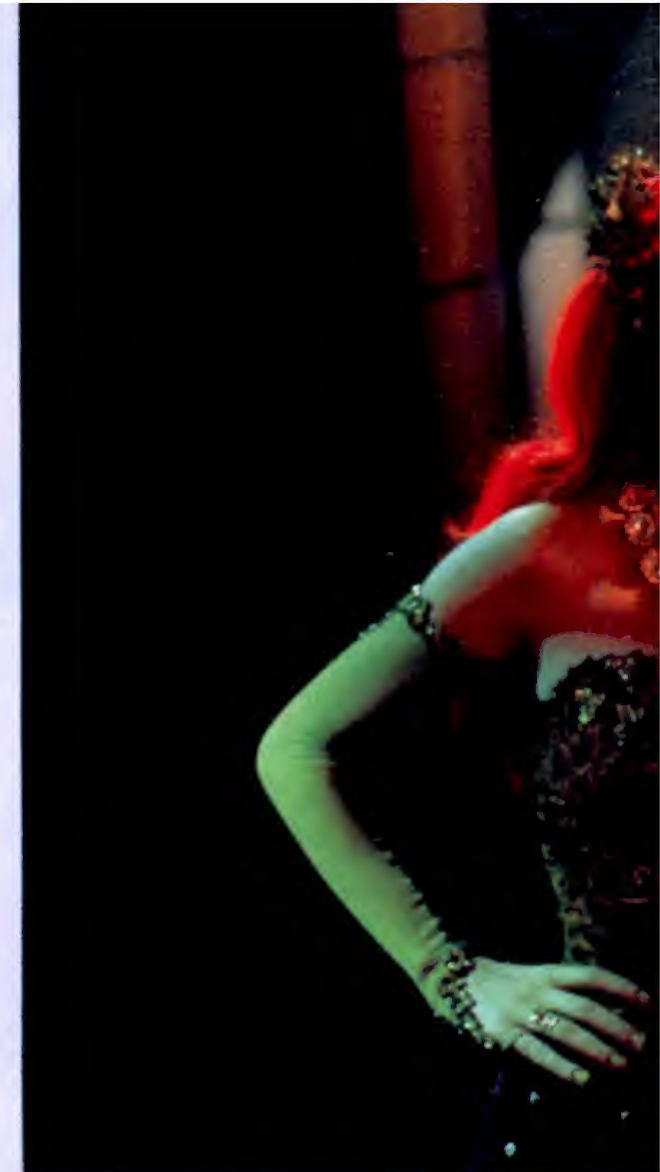
Although director Joel Schumacher is credited with taking BATMAN out of the *noirish* setting of Tim Burton's films, Arnold Schwarzenegger promised his Mr. Freeze would not be the camp creation of the classic series. "Whenever I do a role," he said, "I always assume, and rightfully so, that mine will be the most dangerous, most outrageous, most outstanding and memorable character. Batman experiences that very quickly in the beginning of the movie; how threatening I am, how dangerous. I am not to be joked around with. I make the situation very chilling, very quickly."

Mr. Freeze wants to make the world as cold as his own frozen heart. Freeze was a scientist trying to find a cure for his ailing wife when one of his experiments literally blew up in his face, causing him to not

only lose his beloved, but his very humanity as well. To continue living, he must contain himself in an ice-inducing armor and live with the loss that was the only light in his life. Getting diamonds to power his freezing guns, Freeze has developed the tank-like Freezemobile—an impressive military vehicle capable of burrowing to its target—as

well as various other gadgets to help him wage his war on warmth.

Schwarzenegger found himself in the most impressive costume of his career; a suit of icy armor that even the TERMINATOR might have trouble getting through. The chrome creation weighed down the former body builder with its 60 to 70 pounds of additional



Schwarzenegger as Mr. Freeze, falling under the spell of Uma Thurman.

weight, but that was only the beginning of Schwarzenegger's transformation into the frosty felon. He also had to go through a detailed makeup ritual.

"The challenge was to create a makeup that makes the face and body look as if they really have gone through this traumatic accident where all the hair has frozen off his body," said Schwarzenegger, who wore a bald cap in the role. "There's no body hair left anywhere, and that's very challenging for a makeup artist. You have to make sure that every single hair, because of the silhouette lighting, is gone; otherwise, it doesn't look believable."

"Another thing they had to do

Freeze captures the gem in the Gotham Museum (left & below), iced look by production designer Barbara Ling.



Freeze (r) captures the colossal, diamond needed to power his sub-zero beam, which will ice the world.







Schwarzenegger wore a 70-lb. chrome costume, with a bald cap and painful contact lenses. Right: The design for Freeze's small handgun.

was come up with a proper skin color," continued Schwarzenegger. "What does a human being really look like when he's frozen? What kind of a gray tone? It gets very sick in a way, the research those people do in morgues and all those places. It was filmed in test footage many, many times to create different shades and sparkles with a combination of blue and gray. It was always displayed and demonstrated to Joel Schumacher. He would say, 'Tone it down; more blue; more sparkles; more this, more that.' Slowly, we developed a look for the character." The final step involved painful contact lenses, which Schwarzenegger acclimated himself to a few hours at a time until he could endure them all day long.

"We did some scenes with and without the armor, then with the helmet lit up inside to keep his brain frozen. I also wore a mouthpiece with a battery pack that had to be fitted inside my mouth. It glowed blue and was beautiful looking. I couldn't talk. We had to go back during looping and re-record the dialogue."

While Schwarzenegger has made a fortune and a worldwide reputation in projects in which he is the focus, *BATMAN & ROBIN* gave him the opportunity to become part of

an ensemble. Schwarzenegger noted that director Joel Schumacher was the impetus for him to accept a supporting role. "I had seen all the other *BATMAN*'s, enjoyed them thoroughly and was always interested in playing the ultimate villain in one of those movies, but I didn't really think much about it until Joel came to me and said that he would like me to play Mr. Freeze. He gave me some of the comic books and video tapes with Otto Preminger playing the part in the old TV show. I looked at those and found them extremely interesting and entertaining. I immediately saw myself as Mr. Freeze.

"Then Joel gave me all kinds of drawings, paintings and artwork depicting what I would look like as Mr. Freeze," continued Schwarzenegger. "I said to him, 'This sounds very interesting. Let me think about it. This is really a great character to play.' And Joel turned to me and said, 'Just so you know; if you decide not to do it, then I will cancel my contractual obligation with Warner Brothers. I will not direct the movie because I only can do this movie if you play Mr. Freeze.' So, what are you gonna do? Screw up the whole movie? [Schwarzenegger laughed] He made me feel like I

**"I always assume," said Schwarzenegger, "and rightfully so, that my [character] will be the most dangerous, most outrageous, most outstanding and most memorable."**

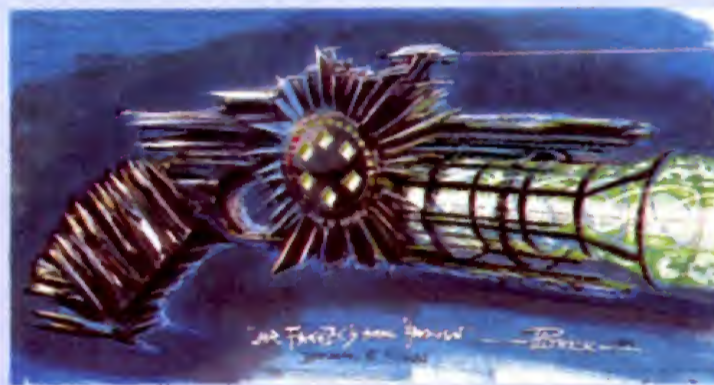
would make this whole thing fall apart if I'm not part of this movie. He made me feel like King Kong. I called him up the next day and said, 'Y'know, Joel? I'm going to do Mr. Freeze."

Schwarzenegger had no regrets, and, despite having worked with some of the best directors in the business, found that Schumacher's set exuded a unique atmosphere. "A Joel Schumacher set doesn't feel like 'Hollywood,'

come over here behind the stage. There are a few people working here who you may not have met.' He says, 'These are the people who are shining your armor, and because it is so well shined you look fantastic in the movie. This is why the movie will be so successful, because you look so sexy. It's their work.' These are the guys who are just shining the armor and putting a little screw in or something, and he makes them feel like a million dollars. On other days, he did that with the stunt men, and those guys walk away feeling like real studs because that was probably the first complement they've had in months.

"That's what makes Joel unique, and that's what makes him a great human being. He also

worked as a little guy when he started out in the movie business and he worked his way up with his intelligence and sensitivity. That's what really made *BATMAN & ROBIN* a fun shoot. Normally, you feel happy on the last day of shooting, but on this one I was sad. I said to myself, 'When am I ever going to have this kind of atmosphere again?'" □



which is usually run under tremendous pressure." said Schwarzenegger. "That does not exist on his set because he makes everyone feel like we're all working together; there's no one above, and there's no one below. We are all one team.

"I can't count the amount of times that he dragged me away from a scene and said, 'Arnold,

Schwarzenegger as Dr. Victor Fries, rehearsing with director Joel Schumacher. "He makes everyone feel like we're all working together," said Schwarzenegger.







## BANE

*Batman's new foe is 400 pounds of muscle and venom.*

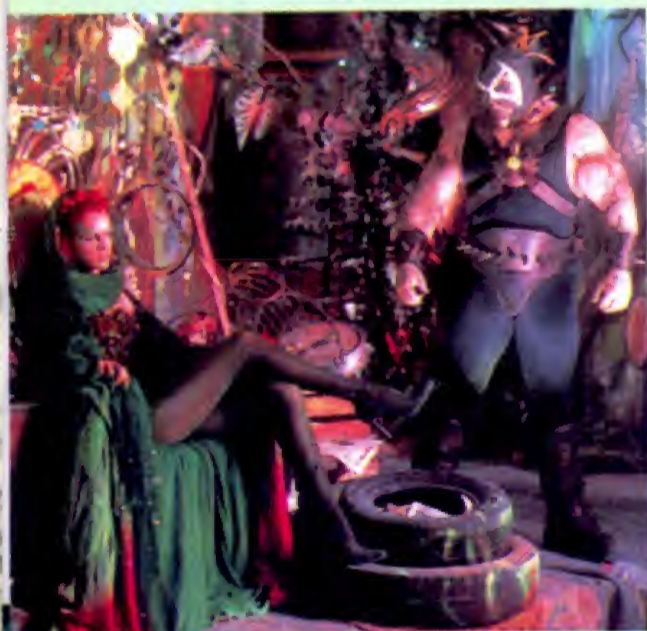
*By Craig Reid*

Rounding out the cast of villains, Schumacher chose to feature Bane, a relatively new figure in the *Batman* pantheon. "My godson, who is seven, became very enamored with Bane," said director Joel Schumacher. "Bane is a great villain. I don't know if you have seen the recent comics but there is this whole series where Bane breaks Batman's back and they bring in a new Batman. So Bane is a huge creature born of and made of venom, steroids and he is kind of Uma's pitbull. His character was really fun."

Bane is portrayed by six-foot-five, 400-pound Jeep Swenson, who is also known as the world-class professional



Wrestler Jeep Swenson plays Bane, Poison Ivy's steroid-induced hitman, a relative newcomer to the comics pantheon, with Uma Thurman (left).



wrestler, "Jeep, the Mercenary." Swenson was "discovered" for a career in film as he worked out in his San Antonio, Texas gym. "My wife and a friend of mine sort of shanghaied me into it," he said. "Back in 1980, I was just training in the gym when these guys came in looking for some big guys to do some fight film," said Swenson. "I ended up playing the part of the Captain America wrestling character

in Jackie Chan's *THE BIG BRAWL*. But I just wasn't interested in a film career. I had the chance to be the Zeus character in Hulk Hogan's *NO HOLDS BARRED*, but that was given to a black guy named Tiny Lester (who stars in Luc Besson's *THE FIFTH ELEMENT*). But what convinced me to pursue a film career was when I was able to work with Chuck Norris in *WALKER, TEXAS RANGER*."

Swenson described Bane as this horrible individual that makes all other bad guys look like choirboys. Four hundred pounds of muscle and with no conscience, he is unfortunately head over heels, like a puppy dog, in love with Poison Ivy. "If she tells him to jump, he says how high," Swenson smirked. "She is in complete control of him. I beat everybody up and it's really a powerful role. In the

Turkish bath scene, you will see how powerful Bane is. Batman and Robin try to kick, punch, and flip me and even throw some plumbing at me. If you slam a door into someone's face, they will get a bloody nose, but when Bane does it they fly two or three blocks down a street. Everything he does is magnified. He never uses a doorknob to open a door. When we were shooting, Joel would always say, 'Oh well, Jeep is stealing the movie.' It was just an honor to work on this film and an honor to work with Joel."

When not acting, Swenson lectures in schools about problem-solving skills and the dangers of alcohol and drug abuse. Swenson affirmed that children are our greatest natural resource. He uses the regimen of body-building to teach that one has to live their life correctly, be the best person that they can be and treat everybody with dignity and respect. With such strong convictions and interests, it only seems appropriate that Swenson's relationships with the stars Arnold Schwarzenegger and George Clooney were beyond self-aggrandizements.

"Arnold is a true professional and I love to watch the man work," he said. "He just wants to make the best possible movie you can make. It is a joy to work with someone who is that professional and perfectionist, yet is still very personable. We would talk a lot about our families. George is just gold. He is unbelievable. Here is a guy who would rather talk about selling clothes at a big and tall store in Cincinnati than talk about how well his career is going. He remembers where he came from. Then with Joel around, how could this film not be fun?" □



crack at the Batcave, which is now the size I imagined it, and the Batmobile.

"I kept feeling that the screen kept making the Batmobile smaller. So I wanted this one to feel like it was a half a block long. The same for the Freezemobile. For the Batmobile, we wanted a moving engine and a single flame was not enough so we opted to use three flames on each fin to create a better illusion.

Schumacher worked closely with Ling in devising the film's look and color schemes. "With Robin I very, very much wanted to retire his tri-colors," he said. "I was inspired by the new 'Night Wing' series in the *Batman* comics. So that was usually electric blue and black and close to Batman. What I did was use the red and black on the Robin signal on his breast and then the suit is bluish black and the cape is red inside. So he is red and black and Batman is black and blue and Batgirl is a sexy version of Batman."

Schumacher noted that he intentionally tried to inject a lighter touch into the series this time, including a scene in which Schwarzenegger's Mr. Freeze smokes a cigar. "I hope to give the audience humor," said Schumacher. "This isn't long day into night Gotham City. They are all called comic books. We are dealing with people running around a major city, obviously based on New York, in costumes, makeup, wearing tight leotards. Why shouldn't we have fun?"

The visual effects wizardry of John Dykstra rejoins the Batman phenomena to magically add to its mythical dimensions. Although usually choosing not to work on sequels, Dykstra asserted that one of the reasons for returning to *BATMAN* was that the film wasn't setting out to rehash trodden ground, and the chance to do things that they weren't able to do on the last film. "There are a hundred-plus special effects shots," said Dykstra. "We're generating more 3-D materials, complex miniature shots and a larger scale approach to computer generated images. The trick is melding them together. The opening sky-board sequence [a sequence that MacGregor-Scott felt very strongly about keeping] where

**"I kept feeling that the screen kept making the Batmobile smaller, said Ling. "So I wanted this one to feel like it was a half a block long."**



The transformation of Dr. Pam Isley (above) into Poison Ivy (right). When she spurns the advances of wicked scientist Dr. Jason Woodrow (John Glover), she gets thrown into a pit of poisonous snakes, turning her blood to venom.



Batman and Robin come down from the sky on skyboards was a unique blend of live action, stuntwork, real and CGI characters with full size and miniaturizations.

"For years there was a line of demarcation. As soon as the camera came to a stop and there was a big wide shot, you knew it was a matte painting," said Dykstra. "We've sort of done

away with that.

"We have a great opportunity in this movie because it is highly stylized. We use colors, motion and graphic composition, dutching the camera [tilting it at an angle away from its vertical and horizontal axis], high-speed photography and over the top things because it is unrealistic."

For Ling, the biggest pro-

duction design challenge was getting Mr. Freeze's ice to look right. "We had sets that were normal and then iced and rather than just having white snow, I wanted to add a translucency to it that could be lit," said Ling. "It was stranger and more surreal and was something no one had ever tried before. It was an enormous trial and error with chemical companies, mold companies. We investigated to see if anyone had ever tried casting in clear resin or clear acrylics. What was even tougher was that we needed hundreds of thousands of square feet of this fake ice [and we needed] to have a set un-iced and iced in a timely fashion. It was really exciting how it all



turned out."

The solution to the problem amounted to finding the right chemical combination. "It was laborious but turned out beautifully, a great fantasy ice on a huge scale," said Ling. "We had to do a gigantic street that was 80 feet by 650 feet long, head to toe, all buildings. I thought, 'What did *DR. ZHIVAGO* use?' Styrofoam so you couldn't light it inside. But I really wanted the inner ice lit.

"Furthermore, doing that on the people was wild. We wanted to see the shape of the body and the face but always wanted to have this whoooosh [the sound effect of being hit by a cold blast of Mr. Freeze's freeze gun] wave





# JOHN DYKSTRA EFFECTS SUPERVISOR

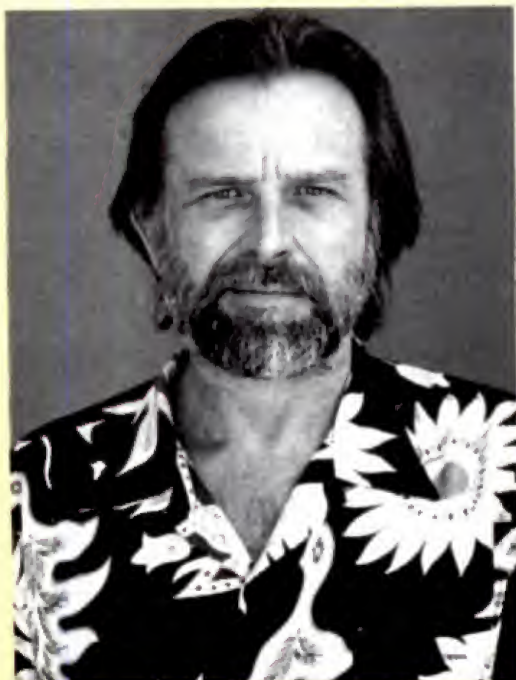
*The architect of ILM on the innovation of STAR WARS.*

*By Craig Reid*

John Dykstra, to many of us, the real star of STAR WARS, resembles one of the Bee Gees, dressed in a Hawaiian style t-shirt. His office at Warner Bros for BATMAN & ROBIN is surprisingly devoid of what one might expect to be filled with STAR WARS paraphernalia. As the film's effects supervisor he was the Oscar-winning architect of its ground-breaking work and the founder of ILM.

Dykstra said he was not involved with the new Special Edition revisions, nor would he have wanted to have been. "I think of the product of my work as practice and the experience of doing the work is the thing that I cherish," he said. "The idea of having something completed is somehow sacred and it seems kind of weird to me to go back. I tend to feel that people tend to hang on to things tightly because they fear that they can't produce something new. So the idea of somehow obsessing

Dykstra, moving on to BATMAN FOREVER and BATMAN & ROBIN's visual effects work.



Dykstra's CGI model of the Freezemobile for BATMAN & ROBIN. The effects innovator saw no point in going back to redo the effects work in STAR WARS.

about what was or wasn't done to that movie certainly goes against my basic philosophy, which is that all of this is impermanent."

Dykstra got his start in film working on THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN with Doug Trumbull. At that time he was working at Trumbull's facility in Canoga Park as a designer, a modelmaker, a still photographer and a cinematographer before collaborating with Trumbull on the special effects of the 1971 science fiction film SILENT RUNNING. The following year, however, he went to work for Berkeley's Institute of Urban Development, where he participated in a sophisticated project applying cinematography and visual effects to the construction of miniature cityscape models.

"There wasn't an enormous market for visual effects films at that time," he said. "So I was introduced to some people who wanted to pursue the idea

of creating the illusion that you were driving down an urban street and the purpose of this was to evaluate alternative architectural styles. This sounds very esoteric, and it is. I went to Berkeley, built a five square mile area of Marin County in miniature and ran a probe camera through the streets and architectural environment."

The experience at Berkeley gave Dykstra the idea for motion-control photography for movies. "We had a computer-controlled camera that drove along the roads of our miniature and the computer controlled the speed of the camera, its position relative to the miniature and it could also control the lights and a few other things. It was a computer the size of three refrigerators. But the relationship I developed with Al Millar resulted in coming back with the knowledge of the means to recreate numerically controlled camera systems. Basically what

we tried to do was create a system that allowed us to use many cameras on many stages at the same time."

In addition to his Oscar for STAR WARS, Dykstra won a scientific/technical special award for the invention and development of the Dykstraflex motion-control camera system used on the film.

Dykstra left ILM to form his own company, Apogee, and in 1979 he received another Academy Award nomination for his work on STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE. "In the earlier versions of STAR WARS and STAR TREK we were trying to do some things that were very different, something to set ourselves apart from the standard," said Dykstra. "The studios understood this. However, once they established the look and a feel for the movie, then it was a matter of reproducing that, and intelligently so. Generally speaking, what happened is the people who hired me to initially create the environment in which these images were produced then came back and hired the people who worked for me to essentially go into another environment and reproduce what we had determined the technique for. I was pretty arrogant in those days and was probably not the most user-friendly person around. I was young and had raging success at an early time. I wasn't a bad person, it's just that I was about doing all this stuff."

Calling himself an image freak who likes to take apart car engines and cameras, then reassemble them, ironically Dykstra noted he was never a fan of STAR TREK or science fiction. □



**“What is important,” said Schumacher, “is that I’m making the movie for the audience that pays to see it ...that is the critic that means the most to me.”**

of ice to get that spikey, iced look on the people.”

Noted Dykstra, “Freezing people was neat. We needed some practical frozen characters, so Joel reviewed some examples. We took mannequins and added resin to them and made them look like they were iced-up. We’ll be creating CGI ice to actually wrap people on screen later. When they’re hit with the freeze ray there will be a transition between the live actor and a version of the live actor with CGI ice on them.”

Freeze’s weapon is a combination of 2-D animation and 3-D modeling. Noted Dykstra, “The vapor effect is a particle effect mixed with some plainer effects which is texture mapped or wrapped onto these 3-D objects and his beam is composed of seven elements, put together with different colors, brightness and fluctuations of brightness and they are integrated into original photography that Joel shot. We used vapor in the original photography to create the transition between frozen and unfrozen objects and created CGI vapor to help us with the same transition on the freeze beam.”

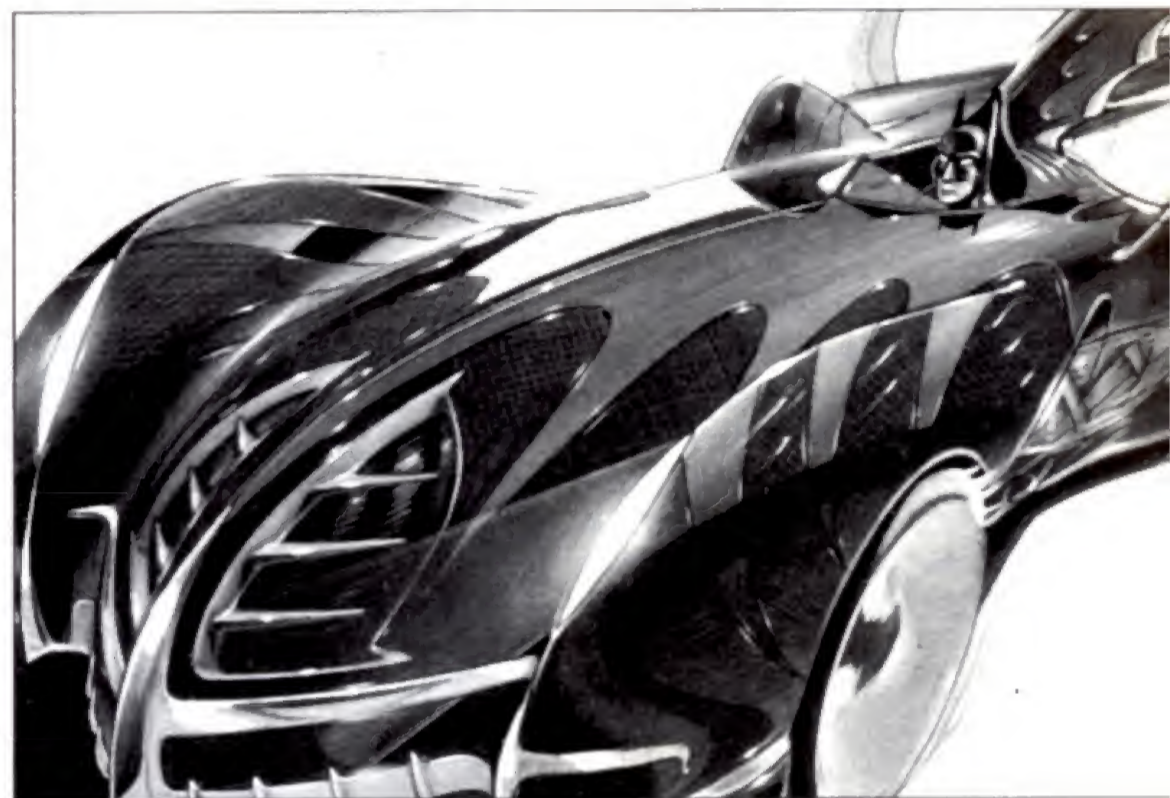
**Alfred welcomes Batgirl to Wayne manor: part of the very emotional human story behind the action and, according to Schumacher, the heart of the film.**

In addition to its visual effects, makeup effects and big-name stars portraying fabled characters, newly revised and familiar vehicles include the Batmobile, Redbird, Batsled, Batblade and the powerful, gleaming Bathammer, and the far-out sets required ranged from the new Batcave to the bizarrely at-



**New and/or improved: the Batplane (top) the Batmobile (right) and Robin’s Redbird—a designer’s feast, and quite a departure from the look of previous bat-goodies.**

tractive Mr. Freeze and Poison Ivy’s lairs, the tremendous expanses of Gotham Museum and the Gotham Observatory, the huge old prison Project Gilgamesh laboratory deeply hidden in the jungles of South America, Gotham’s rooftop Botanical Garden, the maddening Arkham Asylum and the subterranean cityscapes of Gotham. But producer Peter MacGregor-Scott noted there is a point to this endless ??? for fantasy fans.



“There is the element of good triumphs over evil,” he said. “We don’t want to be too heavy-handed with that. It’s important that it sends the right message. The one thing that I must also say about this film is that it was fun making and I will have fun watching it with the audience. I never go to screening or previews, I only go to watch it in the theater because it’s thrilling to work on something for two years and see in front of you an audience of a thousand.”

And what does Schumacher want the audience to get out of this film? He thoughtfully pondered then spoke, “I am not consumed with making movies for certain elitist critics. The boxoffice is just numbers. What is important is I am making the movie for the audience that pays to see it, but I don’t want to exploit them or disappoint them. In the long run that is the critic that means the most to me.”

Who’d have thought that the six-year-old Joel Schumacher, watching Walt Disney’s SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS with wide-eyed won-

derment back in 1945, would grow up to be the watchdog over Warner’s most prized possession. His final words reflect his humbleness and respect for becoming the beneficiary of Bob Kane’s masterpiece. “The Batman cult and legend has a whole life without me,” he said. “It is a whole thing on it’s own. I am only an invited guest. I just hope I can give something to its fans and followers.” □

**Production designer Barbara Ling, expanding and improving on the look of her BATMAN FOREVER designs.**







# JOEL SCHUMACHER DIRECTOR

*Straddling the fine line between art and commerce.*

*By Craig Reid*

"I believe that if I don't strive every day to try to be a better man, to try to serve others and set a good example, then I have no defense for privilege. Everyone in the movie industry is privileged. If people with privilege don't strive to better people, set a good example and serve others, then I think that privilege should be given to someone else."

In an industry where memories are short and facades are a way of life, Joel Schumacher's words of wisdom are a simple, epitomized reprieve from the complexities of a town that often times brandishes a pseudo-sincere philosophical urging of its growing proteges. Yet it is Schumacher's kind of conviction that keeps the public's faith that all in Tinseltown isn't a world of selfish reality. Recently receiving the NATO (National Association of Theater Owners) ShoWest Director of the Year Award, Schumacher's ele-

Schumacher helming D.C. CAB in 1983. He sees film as therapy for hard knocks and hard living.



Joel Schumacher's film *THE LOST BOYS*, the 1987 punk vampire entry of the costume designer-turned-director which showed his flair for casting.

vation to demi-god has not granted him amnesty from his scruples as he still acknowledges his sometimes bleak past and misplaced identity.

"When I was seven, I had this dream that I would make movies," he said in his office at Warner Bros. "I didn't know what a director was, all I knew was that I wanted to make that thing. I grew up in the shadow of a big movie palace (Sunnyside Theater) in Queens, Long Island City. I think the poorer the neighborhood was, the more glamorous the movie theater was. I was one of those kids who had to be dragged out of the movie theater by my mother.

"My father died when I was four. Although my mother was a wonderful woman, I actually lost her when I lost my father because she was always out at work selling dresses six days and three nights a week trying to support us. Being an only child and my mother a widow working so hard, I had very real

concerns. I worked since I was nine, then became successful in the fashion business in order to give my mother the things that she never had."

And work he did. Majoring in fashion design at art school, Schumacher graduated in 1965 and soon thereafter opened a fashion boutique which he named Paraphernalia. When the owner of Revlon bought up his store Schumacher began earning \$65,000 a year. But it was too late.

As if reliving the moment, Schumacher noted reflectively, "Unfortunately when I started to make the big bucks, my mother died overnight, still a very young woman. I never really wanted to work in the fashion business. It was just a means to the end. I had done everything for her. When she died I was very involved in sex, drugs, and the rock 'n' roll culture of the '60s. Like a lot of people in my generation, I became a hardcore drug addict

and got lost in the madness of the '60s. When I was growing up the whole idea of Hollywood was a million miles away and there was no film colony or film school in New York at that time.

"When I got off hard drugs in 1970, I was 130 pounds, had lost five teeth and was in debt for \$50,000. I just woke up and didn't know who I was, where I was, or what had happened [Schumacher sighed]. I was a wreck, a terrible wreck but I realized that I had obviously made every wrong choice in life and felt that I had to go back to the basics and went back to my childhood and thought, 'What was it I really wanted to do?' Movies. This is the strangest part of the story. I was broke, crazy, but in 1970 I just said to my friends that I was going to Hollywood to be a movie director. I am sure they were convinced that I was still on drugs. The odds that it would all work out are impossible. I don't know how it happened."

Schumacher sees the movies as therapeutic, both now and then. "I always escaped into fantasy as a child because I was lonely. I grew up in a very poor, working class neighborhood where the doors were always open. Poor people always have room for one more. It's only the rich people who are selfish. I grew up in a neighborhood with lots of Irish and Italian Catholics, which meant lots of kids, so I think that I lived in the fantasy of other people's families, the movies and comic books. With the alcohol, drugs and sex, I was trying to live the fantasy of real life. Through maturity and sobriety, which was a long time coming, and





Schumacher releases an encounter with Bane and Mr. Freeze in **BATMAN & ROBIN**. The director is already in pre-production on **BATMAN 5** for 1999.

through making movies, I found a healthy way. It's not a 'poor, woe-is-me story,' it's just an evolution of one escape to another and now I can give entertainment that the audience can escape to."

After working the fashion business, Schumacher tasted the entertainment industry as an art director in TV commercials and further whetted his appetite by talking his way out to Hollywood as a costume designer, which led to production design. A stint as screenwriting led to directing.

"I saw writers getting the opportunity to direct, so I sat down at my kitchen table, in my \$50-a-month apartment and wrote a TV movie called, IG-

NORENCE IS BLISS about an actress/model found dead and sold it to Barry Diller, who was at ABC at the time. Although never made, I next wrote a spec script called SPARKLE, a sort of cult film about three African-American sisters who sing R&B in the '50s. I then wrote CAR WASH, which was a big success."

His first directing assignment was the TV movie THE VIRGINIA HILL STORY, after writing THE WIZ in 1978, a film that married his fascination for music and film. Schumacher made his feature film directing debut with THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING WOMAN starring Lily Tomlin.

Schumacher's career ignited

Schumacher's 1990 **THE FLATLINERS**, a superb cast in a life-affirming story about young medical students skirting death and the unknown.



**"In 1970 I said to my friends I was going to Hollywood to be a film director," said Schumacher. "I am sure they were convinced that I was still on drugs."**

after co-writing and directing ST. ELMO'S FIRE, which starred a group of yuppies known as the "brat-pack." The film not only earned Schumacher respect as a reputable director, but proved that he had good casting instincts. Next came his MTV-ish LOST BOYS, which featured rock 'n' roll vampires terrorizing a California coastal town and the death-defying FLATLINERS. As an "A" list director, Schumacher has enjoyed a string of successful once-a-year summer hits starting in 1994 with THE CLIENT, A TIME TO KILL, BATMAN FOREVER and certainly BATMAN & ROBIN.

Noted Schumacher, "The common thread that I see in my films, things that I try very hard to give is first, give people their money's worth, whether it's a big or small film. I like to give new talent a chance and although I have a long way to go to be a better director, I think I have good casting instincts. I have a lot of beautiful people in my films. My tombstone is going to read, 'Joel Schumacher: A Fool For Beauty,'" he laughed. "I grew up on James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, Montgomery Clift; those were the icons of my early years. And there were still the vestiges of all the glamour, with Rita Hayworth and Lana Turner. I grew up on very erotic and beautifully sensual people of the screen."

Schumacher's filmmaking attempts to straddle the fine line between art and commerce. "If you fall onto the art side you can slip into a very pretentious, self-conscious style of filmmaking," he said. "You take yourself too seriously and forget what the role of a director is. If you fall to the other side, you can forget that the film is art. Whether the material is Batman or Shakespeare, your role is to take the audience somewhere exciting. So my cinematic phi-

losophy is to walk that tightrope and try not to fall on either side.

"You can move people but you also have to be responsible. Like in my BATMAN movies, I never kill anyone because I know children are watching. My heroes must solve the problem by outsmarting the villains, not murdering them.

"I am also a strong supporter [in the fight against] AIDS. I have lost many friends to the disease. I felt it was ignored by the Reagan administration and I think the fact that a lot of men, women and children have AIDS now is a result of that. I do public service announcements [recently with Whoopi Goldberg] and try to get teenage girls to make sure they have condoms. I hope through my films I can give people something that they need, too, which is a tonic. Not all medication comes in a bottle, some of it comes in a movie theater. We hope to inspire." □

Schumacher directs Elizabeth Sanders (Mrs. Bob Kane) as the comic's Gossip Gertie in **BATMAN & ROBIN**.







## The growing pains of the apeman's latest incarnation.

By Scott Tracy Griffin

In the competitive syndicated television market, a show's success usually hinges on its ability to generate a faithful fan following. Series like *HERCULES: THE LEGENDARY JOURNEYS*, *XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS*, and *BAYWATCH* have thrived by developing the sort of rabid cult audi-

ence that the *Star Trek* franchise pioneered in the '60s.

Conversely, the producers of *TARZAN: THE EPIC ADVENTURES*, which debuted in 1996, are faced with a looming obstacle to their success: a well-established Tarzan fan club already exists, and they are not happy with the new television show.

"All the Edgar Rice Bur-

In the pilot "Tarzan Returns," Lara gets reacquainted with Bolgani, played by Don McCleod. Lara says he feels a "kinship" with Tarzan, making him a natural.



Joe Lara as Tarzan in the throne room of the Lacerian Lizard Men in "The Secret Diamonds," makeups by John Carl Buechler's Magical Media Industries.

roughs fans I know...feel totally cheated," charges George McWhorter, editor of the *Burroughs Bibliophiles* literary society's journal, the *Burroughs Bulletin*. "The film folks are only using Tarzan as a recognition factor. These episodes with magic and mystic themes have nothing to do with the Burroughs creation."

Burroughs fans had high hopes for *TARZAN: THE EPIC ADVENTURES*, which initially courted fan involvement and endorsement. Former Vice President of SeaGull Entertainment Joel Smith made a pilgrimage to the legendary ERB Memorial Collection at the University of Louisville's Eckstrom Library, and requested spec scripts from a number of professional writers who are Burroughs and Tarzan experts. Unfortunately, none of the writers were hired and ties with fandom lapsed when Smith left SeaGull Entertainment after a dispute during the series' pre-production.

Fans' objections to the show

seem to focus on one critical element: the writing. Not only are the episodes lacking in authenticity, they are simply dull according to fans, not the sort of material that Burroughs would have composed, despite producers' claims to the contrary. One might contend that Burroughs fans have become a spoiled lot, since Tarzan has been associated with some of the greatest names in the field, like Frazetta, Hogarth, Foster, and Manning—tough company for the producers of *EPIC ADVENTURES* to keep.

Asked to comment on fan reaction from location in South Africa, supervising producer Mike McGreevey asserted, "The Burroughs fanatics are pleased." When quoted some of the fans' criticisms of the series, McGreevey seemed baffled at the fans' rejection, and insisted that the production was following in Burroughs' footsteps. Questioned about who wrote the episodes, and their credentials, he declined to answer





# TARZAN

THE EPIC  
ADVENTURES

## JOE LARA

*Action star carries the Tarzan torch.*

*By Scott Tracy Griffin*

Actor Joe Lara, best known for his interpretation of Tarzan in the 1989 television movie *TARZAN IN MANHATTAN*, has once again laced up his trademark leather boots to portray the apeman in *TARZAN THE EPIC ADVENTURES*.

Lara, a former model and photographer's assistant, attributes his casting to the kinship he feels for the character. "We all have a primal side, and it's very alive in me," he said. "I really love the outdoors and the spirit of Tarzan." The fact that Max and Michelline Keller, the producers of *TARZAN IN MANHATTAN*, are part of the creative team of *EPIC ADVENTURES* didn't hurt Lara's casting chances either.

While Lara's distinctly un-African boots and ample, kilt-like loincloth bring to mind the Apache half-breed he played on the telefilm *GUNSMOKE: THE LAST APACHE*, he seems to have the other bases covered for the portrayal of Lord Greystoke: long brunette locks, piercing grey-blue eyes, and a lithe, graceful physique.

Though he doesn't particularly enjoy the work required to maintain his form, Lara stays in shape by running, boxing, and weight training. His regimen is augmented by a careful diet.

Lara hasn't yet emerged as a heavyweight heartthrob, but he does have a following. Cody Phoenix, a machine programmer/technician and aspiring novelist, intends to launch the Joe Lara fan club from her home in New Hampshire via the



Lara in "Revenge of Zimpala," cutting an imposing figure as Burrough's ape man.

Internet.

Lara's films frequently appear on cable, such as *AMERICAN CYBORG*, *HOLOGRAM MAN*, and *STEEL FRONTIER*. Recent projects include *WAR HEAD*, *HUMAN TIME BOMB* and *DELTA FORCE*, which Lara wrapped in Africa before returning to the jungle as Tarzan.

Queried as to whether the literary tradition from which his character was spawned played a role in his youth, Lara evaded the question, but professed that *Tarzan of the Apes* is his favorite novel of the series, and recommends it to women because of the romantic element of Jane's involvement.

Another influence for Lara's interpretation of the role was the Ron Ely *TARZAN* series that Lara watched as a child. The series, which ran for two years on NBC, was a modest success, of-

fering a contemporary good-guy Tarzan policing the jungle against the predations of poachers, mercenaries, and escaped convicts. Ely, who insisted on doing his own stunts for authenticity, broke numerous bones and was mauled by a lion during the course of filming.

While Ely's injuries were legendary, Lara hasn't been hurt during the production of *EPIC ADVENTURES*. Part of Lara's good fortune may lie in the fact that animals don't play a large role in the series. According to Lara, the tight filming schedule of the television series precludes much reliance on animals, which have a mind of their own when it comes to getting a shot in on time.

When asked why Tarzan should appeal to modern audiences, Lara stated, "Tarzan gave up the civilized, secular world because the call of the wild was stronger. I think that's what's fascinating to people."

The actor, who considers himself the spiritual heir of Tarzan, has his own remedy to escape the oppressing crush of life in Los Angeles. His Antelope Valley ranch, purchased as a fixer-upper, provides a desert oasis when he feels the need for peace and solitude. Lara commutes from the city in his airplane, which provides a chance to hone one of his hobbies, aerobatic flying.

Not to suggest Lara has a stressful job, however. "I get up in the morning, put on the loincloth, and go to work by going on Tarzan's adventures," Lara muses, "I'm very thankful, because it's a lot of fun, and I'm really fortunate." □

Fantasy elements of the Burroughs' canon are key to the show's approach.

specifically, stating only that the writers were experienced in film and television production. (*EPIC ADVENTURES* is a non-union project, and, therefore, any Writers Guild members involved would be fined if their contributions were revealed. To bypass this, they write under pseudonyms.)

*EPIC ADVENTURES* parent company, Keller-Siegel Entertainment, is a partnership between Paul and Henry Siegel's SeaGull Entertainment and Max and Michelline Keller's American First Run Studios. The Kellers have a long history with the Tarzan franchise. They initiated their relationship with the 1989 CBS television movie *TARZAN IN MANHATTAN*, starring Joe Lara, which sought to reinterpret an English-language-impaired apeman as a New York City detective. When the networks predictably refused to pick up the pilot, the Kellers went back to the drawing board. (*TARZAN IN MANHATTAN* did receive one dubi-



# TARZAN

THE EPIC ADVENTURES

## E.R.B. EFX

*John Buechler strives for Burroughs-worthiness.*

By Scott Tracy Griffin

FX wizard/filmmaker John Buechler, responsible for the fantastic creatures of *TARZAN: THE EPIC ADVENTURES*, radiates the sort of enthusiasm for Edgar Rice Burroughs' stories one might expect from someone only recently baptized in Burroughs' tales of wonder.

Walking through Buechler's shop is like taking a guided tour through Tarzan's trophy room. A plethora of fantastic creatures in various stages of construction inhabit the cluttered North Hollywood shop, their ultimate destination the Sun City set of *EPIC ADVENTURES*.

Buechler poses with his design sketch of the Leopard Demon, seen in the episode "Possessed."



TURES.

Buechler strode rapidly through the shop, showing off the various creatures with an infectious, almost childlike zeal. There's a miniature Loch Ness monster-type beast for Tarzan's visit to Atlantis; rubber facial prosthetics for the cavemen that will populate several episodes; Mahar and thipdar costumes in progress; and a furry bodysuit for the leopardess demon that will haunt Tarzan in an episode entitled "Possessed."

Dubbed "the man who keeps us honest" by Mike McGreevey, *EPIC ADVENTURES*' supervising producer, Buechler is charged with giving life to the fanciful monsters envisioned by master pulp writer Edgar Rice Burroughs. *EPIC ADVENTURES* claims to be the first serious attempt to bring not only the Tarzan canon, but ERB's other worlds, like Venus and Pellucidar, to the viewing public.

"This is the original," Buechler exulted about his affinity for the genre, "It's an incredible wealth of interesting material that pre-dated the merchandised, franchised, licensed, *STARS WARS* and *FLASH GORDON* stuff. High adven-



Above: MMI foreman John Foster touching-up the sea serpent for the "Tarzan in Atlantis" episode. L: The "Iron Mole" created for "Revenge from Pellucidar."

ture and fantasy has always been my passion."

Only recently has Buechler's passion found a market on American television. The success of *HERCULES: THE LEGENDARY JOURNEYS* jump-started the genre, providing a forum for *EPIC ADVENTURES*, *XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS*, *ADVENTURES OF SINBAD*, and the forthcoming *CONAN* series, leading one to wonder what could be next?

Copies of Burroughs' novels like *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar*, *Carson of Venus*, and *Pellucidar* litter a workshop table, alongside a pile of concept sketches penned by Buechler during skull sessions on the set of the South African production.

Upon hearing that the Kellers' American First Run Studios had obtained the rights to the Conan property, Buechler lobbied for the effects job.

Since Conan wasn't ready to go before the cameras for some time, the producers offered Buechler a spot on *EPIC ADVENTURES* instead, and Buechler readily acceded.

While Buechler enjoyed the early *TARZAN* movies starring Johnny Weissmuller, Lex Barker, and Gordon Scott, like most fans of the novels, he felt that Burroughs' literary legacy remained untapped. "Why don't these guys ever get it right?" he wondered during his youth. "Where's the fantasy, the dinosaurs, the lost temples, Opar and La?" Noted Buechler, "For a long time, it's been a dream of mine to get Tarzan made as a big fantasy."

While fans have been harshly critical of *EPIC ADVENTURES*' scripts, Buechler's creatures have drawn praise, and this element of the series is obviously a labor of love by someone familiar with the source material. □

MMI FX-artist Brad Hardin sets the "life size" giant spider in place. The model was built large enough for Tarzan to jump atop and fight in "Tarzan in Amtor."





ous distinction recently: the *National Enquirer* chose it as one of the worst concepts of all time for a television series). Probably smarting from the silliness of the venture, Lara refused to participate in the syndicated series that the Kellers' American First Run Studios eventually produced.

TARZAN, a 30-minute comedy/drama, debuted in September 1991. Starring Wolfe Larson and Lydie Denier, it returned Tarzan to the jungle, but sought to have Tarzan preach a weekly environmental message in his monosyllabic grunts. Twenty-four minutes a week proved to be an ineffectual format for the jungle lord, and it was off the air in America after one season. The series flourished in some foreign markets, however, and the Kellers produced it for an international audience for two more years while American fans awaited an honest adaptation of their hero.

After the Larson concept ran out of steam, the Kellers teamed with the Siegels, and sought to retool the show. Thanks partly to Joel Smith and partly to the success of HERCULES, the decision was made to return Tarzan to the milieu for which he was intended. EPIC ADVENTURES initially sought to conform to Burroughs' setting, and was developed as a one-hour fantasy/adventure format set in 1912, when Africa was still a continent of mystery.

"Hollywood has ignored the 24 novels that Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote; they've only done Tarzan in the jungle," said Lara, who credited the fantasy setting for his renewed interest in the character. "We're going for more of a science fiction feel, with a fantasy element to the show, without losing the character and quality of Tarzan. We're showing who Tarzan is by using the novels as the format for the scripts," said Lara, though many fans question the series' claims of authenticity in regard to its reliance on Burroughs' source material.

After numerous problems with the pilot, centered primarily on the budget overruns of filming at the Walt Disney/MGM Studios in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, EPIC ADVEN-

#### GEORGE MCWHORTER

**"Tarzan crosses generation gaps, and the film industry has its own formula for each generation. [But] the current approach of magic and witchcraft... doesn't seem to work for Tarzan."**



A close look at the "Queen" Mahar, ruler of Pellucidar in "Revenge from Pellucidar," a Spring sweeps episode directed by John Carl Buechler.

TURES experienced a turnover in creative talent. Supervising producer Dennis Steinmetz was replaced by the aforementioned Mike McGreevey, a former child actor who starred in numerous Walt Disney projects, most notably THE COMPUTER WORE TENNIS SHOES with Kurt Russell. In addition to the turnover in creative personnel, the series was beset with further problems when financier STI Entertainment Group withdrew from the project. Blaming Disney for the cost overruns, Keller-Siegel severed all ties with the studio, and dreams of a Tarzan attraction at the theme park vanished.

Scrambling for financing and a location, Sun City in South Africa was chosen. Though the locale was an inspired choice, designed by "someone familiar with Burroughs" according to McGreevey, the producers put together a crew on extremely short notice, leading to the series' critical flaw, according to its audience: script development.

Burroughs fans, an unusually literate and difficult-to-please lot, are highly critical of EPIC ADVENTURES' story structure and content, evidence of

which can be found in the ERB postings on the Internet. They accuse the producers of shoddy, illogical writing filled with plot holes, that the writers attempt to plug with an over-reliance on magic and mystical elements, which are conspicuously absent in Burroughs' original tales. When questioned about the source of the magic in the episodes, McGreevey stated that the production draws upon local African lore for its inspiration. It bears to note that Burroughs never set foot on the African continent; in their pursuit of African authenticity, the producers seem to be overlooking the fact that Burroughs' tales succeeded without offering authenticity, because he offered the sort of romanticized Africa that appealed to Western audiences.

Fans' frustrations with the show are only exacerbated by the fact that the producers have succeeded admirably in many areas. The "look" of the series has received praise from fans and *TV Guide*, thanks to the production design of South African historian Hans Nel (SHAKA ZULU), effects designer John Buechler (see sidebar, page 50), and inspired local casting. Fan reaction to Joe

Lara is mixed, with most conceding that he looks the part but hasn't been given the proper material with which to work.

Some fans, including McWhorter, accuse the series of "dumbing down" for a child audience. McGreevey confirmed that EPIC ADVENTURES' market has diverted from the intended male 18-49 bracket (the plum group for advertisers) to children, and the production staff was given a directive from above to alter the approach for the family market.

EPIC ADVENTURES has been renewed for a second season. In light of the series' lukewarm reception by the American public, McWhorter and Burroughs fans hope that EPIC ADVENTURES will hire writers more familiar with the property and return to Burroughs' successful formula.

"Tarzan crosses generation gaps, and the film industry has its own formula for each generation," concluded McWhorter. "The current approach of magic and witchcraft was tried successfully in HERCULES, but that doesn't seem to work for Tarzan. The adult audiences traditionally attracted to the Tarzan myth have now yielded to a nearly exclusive audience of children. I hope these are merely growing pains, because Tarzan has much to say to adults." □

Angela Harry as Queen La of Opar, Tarzan's half-crazed literary nemesis and recurring character in the series.





# SWEET AN

## Part fairy tale, part psychotic nightmare,

By Alan Jones

Currently doing the Festival rounds—Edinburgh and Sitges to name just two prestigious events showcasing it—is Curtis Radclyffe's visually impressive directorial debut *SWEET ANGEL MINE*, an art-gore fantasy dealing with the tricky subject matters of incest and child abuse. From the Sitges Festival, the Royal College of Art graduate said, "It seems to be me and Philip Ridley [the director of *THE REFLECTING SKIN* and *THE PASSION OF DARKLY NOON*] who are flying the British flag for surreal fairy tales mining serious subjects. I have no idea myself how to categorize *SWEET ANGEL MINE* because it's not a straight horror film, nor is it a straight psycho thriller. It's something in between with the stern subtext of a Grimm's fable thrown in for good measure. While it works as a genre piece on its own, there are deeper levels to it should you choose to delve."

Set in the bleak backwoods of Nova Scotia, the HandMade Films production tells the tale of Megan and her daughter, Rauchine, whose harsh, simple existence is shattered when Paul, a handsome teenager, turns up looking for his long lost father. What Paul unearths as he takes on the role of Megan's odd-job man—and Rauchine's lover—leads to numerous unsavory revelations and a shocking climax in the hidden Garden of Dead Roses.

*SWEET ANGEL MINE* stars Oliver (THE BROWNING VERSION) Milburn, Margaret (HARRY AND THE HENDERSONS) Langrick, Alberta (CRASH) Watson and veteran British actress Anna (HAUNTED) Massey as an enigmatic grandmother. Radclyffe remarked, "I spent weeks going

**"It's not a straight horror film, nor a straight psycho thriller. It's in between, with the stern subtext of a Grimm's fable thrown in for good measure."**



Margaret Langrick (Rauchine) discovers Oliver Milburn (Paul), tortured in the barn (below), in director Curtis Radclyffe's low-budget British horror film.



through an actor wish list and getting bored when they asked if it was a slasher film. I spent endless hours convincing people it wasn't and in the end I gave up. I went with actors who either didn't care or who were willing to take a risk and travel down an unknown path with me."

Although written by acclaimed novelist Tim Willocks (*Bad City Blues*, *Green River Rising* and *Bloodstained Kings*), with later additions by Sue Maheu, the *SWEET ANGEL MINE* screenplay is based on actual incidents in Radclyffe's life. He explained, "I went to Denmark to visit a cameraman friend about five years ago. He was living with this woman who had a 14-year-old daughter and they were having a terrible time. She seemed to be having an intense sado-masochistic relationship with her daughter—not sexually, I hastily add—and I was inexorably drawn into it as an outside observer. My friend decided he needed a break from the relationship and we ended up going to this island bird sanctuary. It was like sitting on an Ingmar Bergman set! There was this long observation tunnel and it was all very strange and atmospheric, with these black birds everywhere. At the same time, another friend had done a painting of a hooded man crucified to a picture frame."

Radclyffe continued, "All these elements rattled around in my mind and when I got back to London, I was introduced to Tim Willocks. Would he like to write the script? He was intrigued by my inspirations and added his own, like the phantom grandmother and the sequence where Paul goes off to the local town. Tim had trained as a psychiatrist and knew a lot about women trapped in a cycle



# GEL MINE

director **Curtis Radclyffe's debut is art-gore.**

of abuse. He came up with the proven statistic that mothers are usually in collusion with the rape of their daughters. Our original script was entitled *LOVE'S EXECUTIONER*. Then we changed it to *FALLEN ANGEL* before *SWEET ANGEL MINE* was finally decided on." Because of some behind-the-scenes politics, Willocks only receives a "Based on a screenplay by" end credit on the finished film.

After four years of trying to attract financing for his unusual project—"The incest theme was more novel then than it is now"—Radclyffe finally succeeded when he met Sam Taylor who had to her credit the quirky independent social thriller *THE YOUNG POISONER'S HANDBOOK*. "Within five months Sam had raised money from numerous sources including British Screen and the Nova Scotia Film Development Corporation," said Radclyffe. "Once she had flown me over to Nova Scotia to see if I'd like to film there, I fell in love with the place. It was exactly the right landscape for the *SWEET ANGEL MINE* backdrop."

Radclyffe admitted to being influenced by an eclectic pool of inspiration when he directed his avant-garde fantasy. "David Cronenberg's *DEAD RINGERS*, Nic Roeg's early works, Michael Powell's *PEEPING TOM*, German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder—a lot of his films are horror to me—and the first *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* I owe debts to," he said. "I hate the melted-credit-card look of most American movies these days and I wanted to tell this story as visually as possible with very few words. The emotional dynamics of the story needed a moving camera. There had to be a lot of movement."



Another of psycho Megan's victims in the *Garden of Dead Roses*, incest and child abuse treated in the horror idiom.

But it was important to Radclyffe that he avoided the pitfalls and clichés of the horror genre, as he explained. "My whole attitude to *SWEET ANGEL MINE* was to try and not give the game away with camera angles, wide lens shots, or other trickiness. It was imperative I grabbed the audience in a realistic way and then suddenly reveal to them the dream elements. It's vital the audience shouldn't suspect that Megan is psychotic or the grandmother is really a figment of her imagination. I didn't want wobbly pictures with funny colors. In a sense the truth we show is more horrible."

Radclyffe continued, "However, I now see in retrospect that *SWEET ANGEL MINE* is a strange mix of my desperate

need not to be cliché yet having to be so to tell the story in a way audiences will understand. I had an obligation almost to acknowledge the genre cliché as touchstone and recognition points for the fans. Horror films in general rely on that and the fans do like watching material that acknowledges their knowledge. Some of the imagery I indulge in was therefore necessary."

Like the use of dream imagery, for example, in the startling sequence where Paul makes love to Raachine's severed torso? "A lot of the suppressed sexuality comes out in the dreams," said Radclyffe. "All the filthy, nasty, taboo stuff gets buried down below and erupts first in dreams, then ultimately in madness with catastrophic circumstances." As a result, *SWEET*

*ANGEL MINE* is probably the goriest movie for ages.

"That is one of the strongest points of the film, yes," noted Radclyffe of the extreme imagery. I had to show everything as far and as realistically as I could. I was attempting, through the most perverse route available to me, to go for an emotional realism backed up by an inevitable truth. *SWEET ANGEL MINE* deliberately ends on an ambiguous note for that reason. Is Paul alive or dead? I realized halfway through directing the movie that it wasn't really the commercial project I initially thought it would be. So I didn't think it would matter if it ended on a note of anxiety after being both provocative and scary, in equal measures." □



# LEXX

## DARK ZONE ADVENTURES

By Ian Johnston

American viewers will see a slightly different version of LEXX: THE DARK ZONE STORIES when it finally debuts on Showtime in July. The \$15 million Canadian-made science fiction series—which will take the form of four, two-hour TV movies—has undergone some fine-tuning since its pilot episode was screened to a hometown crowd in Halifax, Nova Scotia last September. Showtime changed the airdate to July, and moved LEXX over to Showtime's affiliate station The Movie Channel.

If that weren't enough, it's also changed the title—again. The show, conceived as THE DARK ZONE, will air under the somewhat vague (not to mention inaccurate) moniker of TALES FROM A PARALLEL UNIVERSE.

"It's obviously not my choice, of course," said series creator Paul Donovan, a Halifax filmmaker whose genre work has included the low-budget DEF CON 4 and the time travel comedy NORMANICUS. "Around the world, it's still going to remain LEXX. It's just in the U.S. it'll have the new title."

Donovan, who heads Halifax's production company Salter Street Films, shot his ambitious mix of live action and computer animation last winter in Halifax, and at Germany's famed Babelsberg Studios. Donovan said some recent re-editing had nothing to do with Showtime's decision to delay the show's release.

"Showtime never set any airdate in stone. And besides, the airdate has only been changed for the U.S. It [the pilot] has already been released on video in Germany. And we anticipate the

**An ambitious mix  
of live action and  
computer animation.**



LEXX creator Paul Donovan directs Eva Haberman as sex slave Zev in the pilot "I Worship His Shadow." Twenty one-hour episodes are in development.

series will air in Canada long before July."

However, establishing the show's premise and the back story of the characters in episode one was a bit of a heavy load for TV viewers. Showtime demanded changes, and Salter Street took it upon itself to make a few more of its own.

"TV is a different medium from films, so we're making quite a few changes," said Donovan. "The average ER viewer knows what an ER is going in. With our show, it's a more complicated world, and it takes a little more introduction."

Eliminated for clarity is an early flashback scene in which

security guard nebbish Stanley Tweedle is shown as a rebel being captured by lascivious space pirates. Although that scene does have some significance to the first episode's plot, it left audiences confused as to Stan's allegiance. The deleted scene will appear in episode four—titled "Giga Shadow."

In another instance, captured rebel leader Thodin (Barry Bostwick) has a bug "smart bomb" emerge from his nose, and wreak havoc on his captors. In the new version, the bug will be given a voice (and a personality), identifying its mission more clearly. Donovan said these changes and others have streamlined and simplified the

story for the TV watching audience. "My mother didn't understand it all," laughed Donovan. "So we've added some narration and other things to clear it up."

Still, it's not like the U.S. broadcaster is suddenly getting cold feet about the decidedly eccentric \$15 million sci-fi opus. Writer Jeff Hirschfield, who co-wrote the initial four episodes with Donovan and Halifax writer Lex Gigeroff, said Showtime has shown great enthusiasm for the show's twisted world view, and dollops of violence and sex.

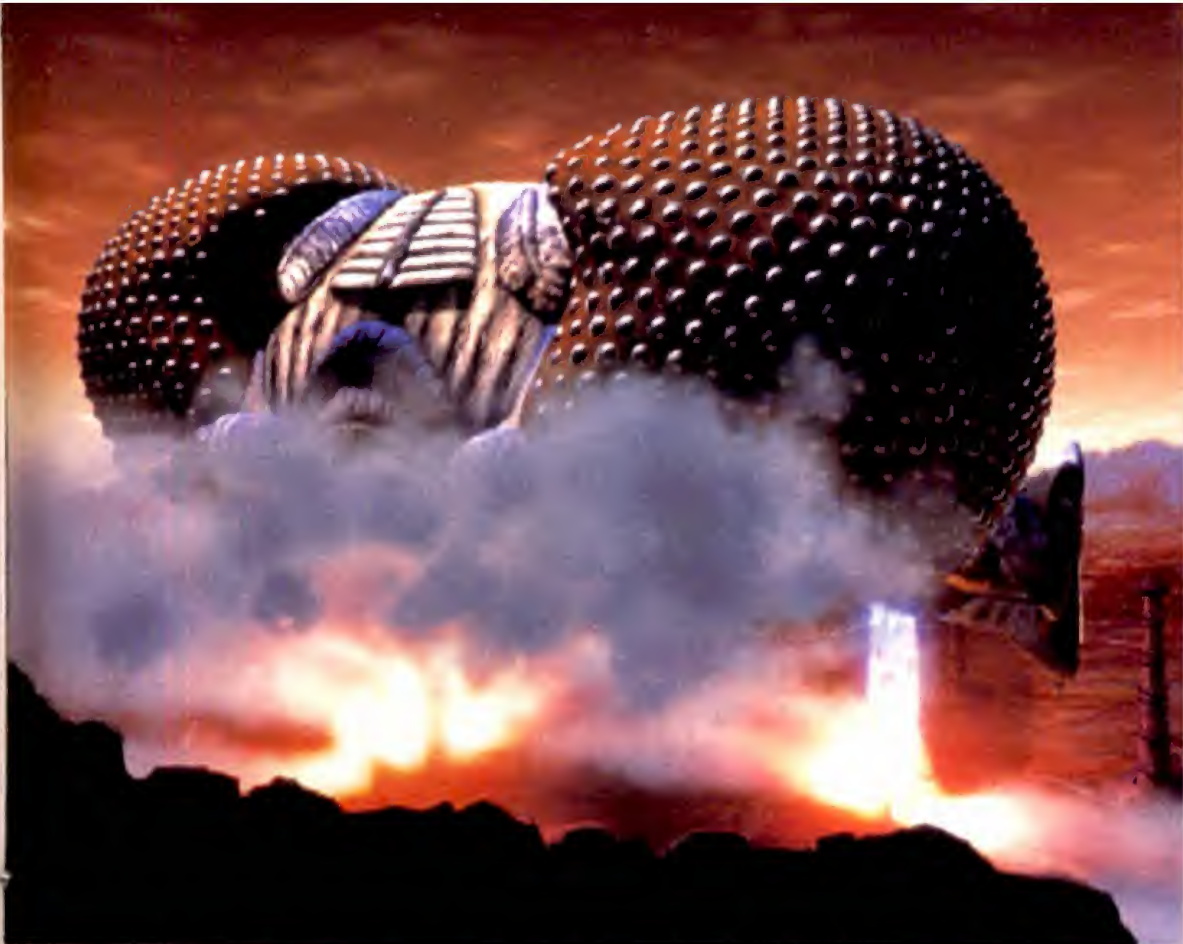
"It has never been a case of too much violence," noted Hirschfield. "Sometimes, Showtime would want the ending changed because the computer animation would be too difficult and expensive. And in one case, they thought the ending of episode four was a little too much like episode three. So we had to go back and do rewrites. We always seemed to be playing catch-up, getting approvals for script changes while they were filming."

It's been a trial-by-fire for both Hirschfield and Gigeroff, whose backgrounds were more in acting and theatre-writing than TV. "It was a learning experience—like boot camp," said the 35-year-old Hirschfield. "The real tricky thing for me was the sky was the limit. You could write about a thing with 20 million tentacles that wipes out 20 planets with no idea that it was do-able."

"As it turned out, there were limits. But Paul [Donovan] wanted writers who initially wouldn't think with limits. Because we didn't have the experience, we didn't know better."

The writers were given something of a creative helping





Landing the Lexx, a living spaceship 10 kms long, CGI by Toronto's C.O.R.E. Digital Pictures. R: The interior of Lexx is so vast it must be navigated by moth ships.

“TV is a different medium from films, so we’re making quite a few changes...With our show, it’s a more complicated world, and it takes a little more introduction.”

—Creator/Director Paul Donovan—

weapons, firing out greenish sheets of CG energy that incinerate whatever they hit, occasionally leaving pieces of the target behind.

“We always wanted unconventional weapons,” said Hirschfield. “But part of the reality of having a gun that shoots out a sheet that dissolves stuff,

There were also several do’s and don’ts the writers had to follow. “One of them was that a hero can’t escape because the people chasing him are a bad shot,” said Hirschfield.

“That’s huge when you think about it. James Bond is an extreme example. Even though this great assassin can pick off a kitten from a skyscraper, he can’t hit James Bond? And if you look at STAR WARS, as wonderful as it is, they do get away a lot because no one can shoot. Not every shot has to hit. You can miss once. Otherwise, you’re dead. So we don’t have a lot of gunplay.”

In the end, LEXX is more about bodily functions than gunplay. Episode three—called “Eating Pattern”—features guest star Rutger Hauer as Bog, the leader of a planet of garbage whose inhabitants subsist on a mixture of planet seepage and body parts they remove from each other and grind up.

“That’s more my ball park,” said Gigeroff, who has a supporting role in the episode as one of Bog’s drug-addled minions. “I remember two years ago saying that I’d love to see all these character eat and shit and fuck and fart and other stuff you really don’t see in space. I thought we could build a whole episode out of them just running out of food.”

International sales for the initial four episodes of LEXX have been strong. The show has been sold to over 40 countries so far, raising hopes the show may soon be filming more episodes.

Preproduction is already underway on a proposed additional 20 episodes, though Donovan said there are still some wrinkles to iron out before the cameras roll. “I’ve still got to raise \$40 million,” he said. □

hand by LEXX’s reliance on a tremendous amount of computer animation, supplied by Toronto’s C.O.R.E. Digital Pictures, whose previous work included JOHNNY MNEMONIC, and TV’s TEK WAR.

C.O.R.E had 20 animators working for 15 months on the project in Toronto, Halifax, and Berlin. In the end, more than 70 percent of LEXX’s footage will feature some form of CG effects, or augmentation.

Still, at \$15 million for four TV movies, money was tight on LEXX. Often the best and cheapest solution wasn’t to go with the computers. Matte paintings, models and stop-motion effects (supplied by Halifax’s Albiston Models and Effects) are also employed throughout LEXX.

“Some mattes were used in episode two because, well, we were going way over budget for CG work,” said Bob Munroe, President of C.O.R.E. “The example I like to use is BEN HUR. This huge chariot race was described simply in the script as ‘They race.’ Two words and look what they put on the screen.

“So when the script said ‘a brand new planet you’ve never seen before,’ that’s a lot of work, and it may translate into \$200,000. It got to the point that it was easier to do matte paintings than five people building this whole world.”

Albiston, who provided stopmotion effects for Donovan’s 1989 ghost tale

GEORGE’S ISLAND, was something of a jack of all trades on LEXX. With a budget around \$300,000, Albiston’s team provided several of LEXX’s space ship models, a six-foot “Cluster Lizards” puppet, background star scapes, as well as the LEXX ship’s obliteration of a space custom station in episode one. The explosion involved the detonation of a two-foot model in the effects shop’s parking lot.

Observed Albiston supervisor David Albiston, “Bob [Munroe] may correct me, but I don’t think things that get blown up look right unless it’s shot at high speed using real models. They may enhance it with computers, but computers just don’t blow things up well.”

Of course, budgetary compromises can prove interesting as well. Hirschfield noted that hand-held “black pacs” are both economical and cool-looking



is that it’s simpler to film. There aren’t any squibs, or explosions. You just fire it at a door, stop the camera, remove the door, throw in some smoke and you’re on your way.”

In bringing the LEXXian world to life, the writers attempted to avoid some of the makeup pitfalls of science fiction’s most famous institution—STAR TREK.

“Rubber-faced aliens or shell heads just don’t cut it,” said co-scripter Gigeroff. “You’re either humanoid or something completely out there. We don’t want any rubber masks.”

Unconventional hero Stan Tweedle (Brian Downey) and mysterious beauty Wist (Doreen Jacobi) confront Rutger Hauer as Bog the leader of a planet of garbage.





# BUDDY

## Caroline Thompson on directing her true-to-life fairy tale.

By Douglas Eby

With writing credits for EDWARD SCISSOR-HANDS, THE ADDAMS FAMILY, THE SECRET GARDEN, THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS and HOMEWARD BOUND: THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY, Caroline Thompson is making her second film as writer/director with BUDDY, following her 1994 directorial debut BLACK BEAUTY. Thompson acknowledged that the tale of BUDDY, a gorilla raised by eccentric socialite Trudy Lintz in the '20s, is not well-known by the public. But visiting the London Zoo gorillas as part of her research for the film, Thompson noted, the zookeeper there "had a four-inch scrapbook of stuff about Lintz and Buddy."

The unique story of Lintz and her New York estate menagerie was first brought to Thompson's attention by a Columbia Pictures executive, and the book *Animals Are My Hobby*, Gertrude Lintz' autobiography. Thompson said she loved the narration right away: "I was utterly moved by the story, and I was drawn by its connection to the story I love to tell, which is a world that seems beautiful and safe and perfect, but kind of blows up in your face. And it has the things that I love the most in stories, which is to say it's enormously whimsical, and



Russo and Buddy full-grown, a bond of love that inevitably ends in heartache.

it gets incredibly sad and heartfelt. So it had my two favorite emotions: whimsy and sadness."

Thompson also found Buddy himself "so moving—so alive and sentient and so tragic in his inability to communicate his needs except in an extreme way. He seemed very human, but tragic for not having language. Needless to say, he understood a tremendous number of words, and had his own way of communicating back, but at that time the teaching of sign language to primates wasn't in anybody's mind. In the '20s if a primate was brought out of its

native land to a zoo, generally it died within weeks or months.

"And Gertrude Lintz, though this is not really a focal point of the story, pioneered nutrition for these animals, and was one of the first people who was successful in keeping them alive for years and years. In fact, the gorilla upon whom our story is based is the longest-lived gorilla in the history of captivity; he lived to be 55. Lintz was also an early pioneer of habitats in zoos. Needless to say, we pushed it a little further than was real at the time for the fairy taleness of the story, but she designed a situation for him in the zoo that was much grander and more complicated and interesting than a cage. One of her theories was that these animals died of boredom and homesickness as much as anything else."

Lintz and the gorilla she raised more or less as her own child had a strong bond of connection from the start, Thompson pointed out: "She saved his life. He was dying of pneumonia as an infant in the Philadelphia Zoo, and she had been raising chimpanzees, and was known as a nut who would take orphan animals into her home, particularly primates, so they phoned her up and she brought him home. And her husband was a doctor, but at that time there were no antibiotics, there



Actress Rene Russo plays true-life '20s socialite Trudy Lintz.

was very little known about how to cure something like pneumonia, but between them they saved the infant's life. I think the intensity of that really bonds her close with him. Plus the fact that very little was known about gorillas and their behavior, so it was a process of discovery, and the intensity of his emotional closeness to a human took her by surprise, and sort of knocked the wind out of her."

The depiction of this emotional bond between gorilla and human on film was, Thompson noted, a matter of some delicacy and difficulty: "Buddy hooked into her in this particular way that none of her other animals ever did. So when Buddy made his plea, if you will, for 'I'm not what you want me to be, I'm what I am' it was difficult. He kind of hit adolescence, if you want to make the metaphor a human one, which is really accurate in a primate. They hit adolescence, as we do, and you say to them, 'Eat your dinner' and they say, 'Make me.' Lintz was one of those people who created a complete and utterly magical and self-contained world, but it didn't really allow for the deviation of what she herself perceived. So when he made this stand, he finally just had to tear up the house and her world to get her





Lintz nursed a baby gorilla back to health and kept it as a pet, a story that parallels 1949's *MIGHTY JOE YOUNG*, currently being re-made at Disney.

attention.”

Thompson had not been involved with animatronics except for a “tiny, brief scene with kicking horses” in *BLACK BEAUTY* before doing *BUDDY*, and she noted, “It was quite interesting. It’s a very delicate machine. What astonished me, though, was the relationship between the performer inside the suit and the performer who was operating the face. The synchronicity between the two people was something; it got to the point where they would be sitting in my office, with their legs crossed left-over-right, and then at the same time switch to right-over-left, and make simultaneous gestures. It was really wild. They were geniuses at it.”

Aside from appreciating its value for the film, Thompson noted that animatronic work “slows production down enormously, because the performer in the suit was totally blind. Often in an ape suit, they’re constructed so you use the human eyes for the face, but when you do that, the anatomy of a human is really different from a gorilla’s; the bridge of the nose and the spacing of the eyes is different, so the face ends up not looking at all like a gorilla. So I said they had to build the entire face,

and Henson came up with this amazing technology that came from the aircraft industry whereby the eyes can track. In the old days, when you had an animatronic face, and the eyes needed to refocus on something, they would have to close, the head would turn, then the eyes would open; otherwise they’d go kind of googly-eyes. But for *BUDDY* they devised a system whereby the entire head can move, and the eyes can track. It’s unbelievably real feeling. It was totally miraculous to us.

“But that being said, the performer is not only encased in this rubber suit, but he’s completely blind in there, and can only work in the head for, at the most, a half hour. That was real-

## DIRECTOR CAROLINE THOMPSON

**“How interesting to be in a world where the culture is exploring the beast within, and how rich, juicy and brave. This is an interesting time trying to connect with Trudy Lintz.”**

ly a challenge. But it’s like having a baby: the further away from the shoot, the more you forget the bad things, and only remember the good.”

“There was one scene where I had three actors, four chimps, and the animatronic gorilla all together, and that was really fun. It was really amazing, it was a great day. The potential for chaos was always there; that’s why I loved it so much.”

Aside from working with an animatronic version of a gorilla, Thompson said one of the other main challenges for her was having a story with a lead actor. “In *BLACK BEAUTY*, I had 50 actors who came and went,” she said, “and working with a movie star was a whole new experience for me. And I must say, Rene Russo is not only incredibly talented, far more than I realized, but she’s one of the nicest human beings I’ve ever met. So it made life really easy, and interesting, and we had a really intense relationship.”

Reflecting on what this film means for her creative growth, Thompson noted, “The scary thing about me, and/or the interesting thing I guess, is that I do seem to have this story that obsesses me: about the outsider. And I never realize I’m writing that story again, until I’ve already written it again. This

movie was wonderful for me because I was really able to express a lot of things; not just that story, but I was able to sort of thicken it, I hope, with the companion story of Trudy Lintz, who’s fascinating because she’s both hero and villain of the piece. To counterpoint her story to the story of the outsider, which is represented in Buddy’s character, was really fun, really hard and interesting for me.”

Having the film setting in the period of the 1920s was also appealing to Thompson, she noted: “This was a time when eccentricity was honored, when people said, ‘What are we made of? Let’s find out.’ It was also a time when Freud was new, and people were exploring, as they put it ‘the beast within’ and thinking about the id. But now, in the ’90s, what are we exploring? The child within. How much more interesting, at least to me, to be in a world where the culture is exploring the beast within, and how rich and juicy and how brave. And this is where people have had an interesting time trying to connect to Trudy Lintz: a world where someone isn’t judged negatively, necessarily, for being different.

“It’s a very insular movie in some respects, and there are only a couple of visitors who come to her world. But she had no self-doubt about her own obsessions. Isn’t that wonderful? And what a great gift. I’m sure it’s a romanticizing of the era, but I really feel that at that time there was a greater freedom to look at the things that we would now consider very strange. You weren’t labeled as aberrant; you were labeled as interesting. To me, the change from that is more than a loss; it’s a horror. And I think it accounts a lot for how bland our world is.” □

Caroline Thompson directs Russo and effects by the Henson Creature Shop, giving the film the whimsical fairy tale quality of her best work.





## FANT-ASIA

By Craig D. Reid

## ASIAN INVASION

*Two U.S. films capture authentic Hong Kong flavor.*

As the success of Fant-Asia film flourishes in the cinematic hallways of Western watchers, privy American filmmakers have repeatedly attempted to emulate the creative genius of Hong Kong stylized action. Failures like the feeble *BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA* and *MORTAL KOMBAT*, films that boasted the "Hong Kong look," not only lacked the vision but lacked the choreographical clout. Although some Hong Kong directors such as John Woo and Ringo Lam have steered their way into Hollywood, perhaps seated in American vehicles which consequently compromised their driving skills, Fant-Asia royalty Tsui Hark and Ronny Yu are now burning rubber at TriStar and MGM respectively in the vehicles of their choice.

Arguably the most successful filmmaker in the history of Chinese cinema, Hark's American directorial debut, *DOUBLE TEAM* (Columbia, 4/97, 91 mins., R), is Jean Claude Van Damme's most optically compelling and visually pleasing film to date. If you can get over the painfully cliched basketball one-liners and co-star Dennis Rodman's initial presence (which does improve), Tsui weaves an intelligent carpet of colorful ambivalence, then pulls the rug out from under our feet as we gleefully fall for his impeccable use of eye-catching imagery that makes you gasp, "What was that?" Whether it's Van Damme doing a 370 degree twist-over-body flip

**Tsui Hark (A CHINESE GHOST STORY) on the set of his high-tech espionage thriller DOUBLE TEAM.**



**The fanciful visual style of Hong Kong helmer Ronny Yu (THE BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR) emerges intact in his first American film, WARRIORS OF VIRTUE.**

before shooting his gun or the mad, mad, mad cameo Yin Yin Zheng's marvelous twist on the cutting edge of podiatry (right out of Dean Shek's *DRAGON FROM RUSSIA*), *DOUBLE TEAM* is full of interesting physical sight gags that keep you waiting for whatever else Tsui can dream up.

Sporting a George Clooney haircut, stubbled beard, and the loss of a few pounds, Van Damme fits into his Bondish character, where in fact his Euro-accent actually works. Fight choreographers Samo Hung and Sammy Wong (one of Jackie Chan's proteges) create some magical pugilistic moments, even making Rodman look like a lean, mean fighting machine. Tsui's debut is a delectable dive into Tinseltown's tributaries that not only gives Van Damme a new look but also gives American action film a needed shot in the arm, a shot that will eventually be heard around the world.

Just as you thought that Tsui's fantastical Fant-Asia style filmmaking had bamboozled your brain, Ronny Yu comes along and really knocks you out with what I believe is the best fight choreography of any American-funded film to date, even surpassing Bruce Lee's classic *ENTER THE DRAGON* (which is very hard for me to admit). *WARRIORS OF VIRTUE* (MGM, 5/97, 104 mins., PG) is a rhapsodical romp through the magical Land of Tao. It is also a journey of self-realization for teenager Ryan Jeffers, who is mag-

ically transported to Tao via a vortex of swirling waters.

The film opens with a shot of a Buddhist rosary becoming unstrung—a sign of foreboding doom, according to Chinese folklore. As the beads surreally bounce and roll in slow-motion, announcing the evil about to occur, there is no question that director Yu has captured on screen what he does best, without compromising his vision or imagery (like *DOUBLE TEAM*, the film benefits from the cinematography of fellow Hong Kong export Peter Pau). The villain Komodo is a unique hybrid of Bridget Lin's character in *BRIDE WITH WHITE HAIR* and the sorrowful scarred Song Dan Ping (Leslie Cheung) in *THE PHANTOM LOVER*, yet he is deliciously drenched in actor Angus MacFayden's lust for classic Gothic villainy. Yu even dares to borrow from his film faux pas *SHOGUN AND LITTLE KITCHEN*, curiously casting Victor Wong from the aforementioned *BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA*.

The *Warriors of Virtue* are five kangaroos (affectionately known as Rooz), schooled in philosophy and martial arts, who have adopted names, characteristic elements, and ancient martial art fighting styles that correspond to traditional Chinese virtues described 2500 years ago. However, only after viewing the film can one appreciate what the title is all about. The phrase "Warriors of Virtue" could misleadingly convey that war is

virtuous. Yet for those that imbibe the film's genius and disregard the rubrical misnomer, a special treat indeed awaits your palates.

What is most delightfully amazing is the intricate martial arts wizardry pieced together by fight choreographer Tsui Siu Ming. Watching these Rooz rock and roll, glide and slide, and thump and jump—without any apparent limitations—is mind boggling. They defeat their opponents not with vicious, blood-and-guts resolve but with fanciful, ballet-like artistry. The wire work will astound you, but even more remarkable is how the stunt actors were able to perform their wild weapon-brandishing maneuvers while cloaked in vision-limiting costumes. Special praise goes to Tony Gardner's Alterian Studios for the agile animatronics.

In a world full of negative karma, I try to write only positive comments about films I critique, but for *TURBO: A POWER RANGERS MOVIE* (Fox, 3/97, 99 mins., PG), I had to choose between principles and honesty. Well, the sound of the trumpet playing taps is not for an Armed Forces funeral but for a degrading attempt by a company to market a dying franchise. It is quite obvious the only thing people wanted to do in *TURBO* was to collect a paycheck, get off the set, and get on with their lives. With less than four minutes of unoriginal martial arts action (the sort of stuff a few guys from the local martial arts school could piece together in one morning with their grandmothers) the film makes the first *POWER RANGERS* movie look like *STAR WARS*.

The addition of a little boy as the new Blue Ranger thoroughly devours the plot, full of more holes than mice-infested Swiss cheese, which centers around the Rangers' effort to prevent the marriage of the villainous space vixen Divatox to Melagor, a reddish, rubber suited, fire-shooting monster that conveniently becomes a giant so the Rangers can unite their newly acquired zords (supercharged vehicles) into an Optimus Prime Transformer clone that really does nothing. Don't rent the video or watch it when it comes to premium TV. Even the kids in the audience were either yawning, leaving, or asking...why? □



*Quintessential confectionary keeps tongue in cheek.*

**THE FIFTH ELEMENT**

Columbia Pictures Presents a Gaumont production of a Luc Besson film. Producer: Patrice Ledoux. Co-Producer: Iain Smith. Director: Luc Besson. Story by Luc Besson. Screenplay by Luc Besson and Robert Mark Kamen. Director of Photography: Thierry Arbogast. Production Designer: Dan Weil. Editor: Sylvie Landra. Special Visual Effects Supervisor: Mark Stetson. Costumes by Jean-Paul Gaultier. Music by Eric Serra. Rated PG-13, 112 minutes.

Korben Dallas.....Bruce Willis  
 Zorg.....Gary Oldman  
 Cornelius.....Ian Holm  
 Leeloo.....Milla Jovovich  
 Ruby Rhod.....Chris Tucker  
 Billy.....Luke Perry  
 General Munro.....Brion James  
 President Lindberg.....Tommy "Tiny" Lister Jr.  
 Fog.....Lee Evans  
 David.....Charlie Creed Miles  
 Right Arm.....Tricky  
 General Staedert.....John Neville  
 Professor Pacoli.....John Bluthal  
 Mugger.....Mathieu Kassovitz  
 Mactilburgh.....Christopher Fairbank  
 Thai.....Kim Chan  
 Neighbor.....Richard Leaf  
 Major Iceberg.....Julie T. Wallace  
 General Tudor.....Al Matthews

by Steve Biodrowski

At least since STAR WARS legitimized the concept with its box office returns, we have learned not to expect thematic ambition or narrative sophistication in science-fiction cinema. Instead, one hopes that, if the filmmakers do not make interesting elaborations in the storytelling, at least they elaborate on the visual scheme in ways that enliven the imaginary world being created. Perhaps the ultimate example of this was the 1982 masterpiece, BLADE RUNNER, of which director Ridley Scott said, "The design is the statement."

He was right. What separates good art from great art is the nuance brought to the subject, and that need not take the form of snappy dialogue or unforeseen plot twists. As long as the basic scenario provides a solid foundation, the structure itself can be built up from the production design, camera work, lighting, or effects, as easily as from the writing.

A case in point is THE FIFTH ELEMENT, Luc Besson's new science-fiction thriller. Besson and co-writer Robert Mark Kamen have concocted a solid foundation for a science-fiction epic that begins in Egypt of the past, zips ahead into the future, and manages to bring the story full circle by the end, while portraying an Apocalyptic confrontation with a cosmic Evil that could obliterate the Earth. This set up, however, is merely a MacGuffin to fuel the action and provide as many set pieces as Besson can envision. On a narrative level, the film resembles a mini-series condensed down to a fea-



In Luc Besson's amusing sci-fi epic, Bruce Willis plays straightman to Milla Jovovich's naive alien savior, an embodiment of the perfect "Fifth Element."

ture, which would suggest a five-hour director's cut lying around somewhere that explores all the mysteries left unsolved. At least, it would suggest this with anyone but Besson at the helm. The truth is that he is not interested in elaborating on his plot. (My personal favorite: How did the sentient black hole of Evil and its minion on Earth [Gary Oldman] ever form their partnership, and what's in it for Oldman, who seems likely to be annihilated along with the rest of Earth's population?)

This deficiency of storytelling is responsible for the hostile critical reaction, but it doesn't explain the depth of that hostility. We really had no reason to expect anything else from Besson, whose films have always emphasized visual impact, whether vaguely mystical (THE BIG BLUE) or gratuitously violent (LE FEMME NIKITA). The difference is that critics will forgive any absurdity in a foreign language film (of which there were many in NIKITA), but American film does not get off so easily—especially when directed by someone who used to work overseas. It's as if some fall from grace must be punished in the press. Well, there are flaws in FIFTH ELEMENT, but they are hardly fatal to the entertainment value, which is immense. So what if the story's not great; Besson's stories never were, so it's not as if some subtle virtue has been lost in

his trip across the Atlantic. If anything, the film takes the virtues of his previous work and expands them. This is a guy who always knew how to shoot great images and put them together into breathtaking sequences, and now he can afford to do more than ever before. If things got wild in LE FEMME NIKITA and THE PROFESSIONAL, they go far wilder here, thanks to a budget that lets the director go off like a loose cannon.

What maintains interest is the Besson's keen visual sense. The overcrowded future metropolis, despite an obvious debt to BLADE RUNNER, is a thoroughly original, convincingly possible future. Every piece of production design, whether realized as a set or a special effect, suggest functional use of limited space put to best advantage. The result seems as if it could actually exist.

Somehow, the performances don't get washed out by all the high-tech flash. This is probably due to the film's saving grace: a sense of humor. Willis deadpans his way through, playing straight man; the film takes advantage of his DIE HARD persona to launch into some overdone action, knowing that audiences will accept it because of his past screen appearances. Ian Holm, who never seemed very funny before, uses his stuffy English mannerisms to pull laughs from the audience. Oldman, apparently not wanting to be

the second eccentric Englishman in the cast, affects a Southern accent that sounds truly riotous coming out of his mouth. Chris Tucker's Prince-impersonation is initially grating but improves once the action cracks the character's sang-froid. Even Milla Jovovich comes across appealingly, although the film asks little of her besides that she appear the embodiment of "perfection" to all the (male) characters.

Yes, the unanswered questions are nagging distractions in what could have been considerably more profound. (For a start, the script could have defined the term "Fifth Element;" in ancient philosophy, "quintessence" meant the ultimate substance, of which heaven was composed.) On the other hand, the film seldom takes itself seriously enough to make these disappointments felt. We could quibble about the unexplained relationship between Oldman and the Evil entity, but it's hard to care after seeing him receive a long distance phone call from his Master. How can you hate a film in which the villain gets a phone call from an entire planet?

Only near the end does the film collapse under the weight of cliché. Jovovich, a sort of extraterrestrial messiah, representing the ineffable "Fifth Element" of the title, learns a bit about the less savory aspects of Earth's history and begins to wonder whether the planet is the worth saving. Her disillusionment is so brief that its introduction seems obligatory, as does its resolution: her faith in mankind is redeemed by love. After all that preceded, one would expect Besson to make some kind of joke out of this, but he plays it straight, much to the film's detriment. And the climax itself is somewhat anti-climactic: Armageddon consists of a brief beam of light that zaps the previously unstoppable evil out of existence. But then, that's the problem with trying to build a film entirely around the impact of the visuals: if the image is less than absolutely awe-inspiring, there is no dramatic structure to involve the audience and make them forgive you. But these brief missteps come too late to ruin one of the most entertaining tongue-in-cheek confections to emerge this year. □



## FILM RATINGS

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Fodder for MST-3K

### ANACONDA

Director: Luis Llosa. Writers: Hans Bauer and Jim Cash & Jack Epps, Jr. Columbia, 4/97. 89 mins. PG-13. With: Jon Voight, Jennifer Lopez, Ice Cube, Kari Wuhrer.

Most of the interest in this botched effort comes from trying to figure out just what the filmmakers intended: a rousing action-adventure? a horror film? a tongue-in-cheek popcorn movie? or an outright piece of camp? Try "none of the above." The script operates on the level of a bad exploitation movie, not all that far removed from director Luis Llosa's producing effort for Roger Corman, *WATCHERS III*, which also served up a hapless cast of characters to a monster in the jungle. However, this big studio production has none of the drive and intensity (not to mention gore, sex, and nudity) that galvanizes some exploitation cinema to the level of crude art.

The anacondas of the title (there turn out to be two) fall prey to the same flaws that plague rampaging animal stories in general and rampaging snake stories in particular (anybody remember 1983's *SPASMS*, with Oliver Reed and Peter Fonda? I thought not), to wit: no matter how big the beast is, with modern technology it would be no problem to blow the damned thing out of the water—unless its powers and intelligence are pushed so far beyond reality as to be unbelievable. In this case, the script pays some lip service to portraying the serpents as mystical guardians of a reclusive Indian tribe, but mostly the film relies on the special effects to carry us past our incredulity. However, the problem is only exacerbated by the use of CGI, which makes the creature far too smooth and fast—it often seems to be gliding rather than slithering (this is one cold-blooded animal with the metabolism of a hyperactive hummingbird). Some of the concepts for the attack scenes are genuinely frightening (one character, trying to dive down a waterfall to safety, is snatched by the head in mid-air), but the cartoony look of the computer graphics mitigates the impact of the scenes, which might have been better achieved with stop-motion.

The cast is mostly undermined by the silliness of the proceedings. Only Ice Cube comes off well: with his "what the hell is this bullshit" expression, carefully modulated throughout, he perfectly channels viewer dissatisfaction with the preposterousness of the film, thus becoming an ideal audience surrogate who expresses all the contempt that they are feeling.

Voight, talented at bringing nuance to realistic characters, is miscast in a film that relies on stereotypes; apparently realizing this, he plays the villain with tongue-in-cheek. However, unlike Marlon Brando in *THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU*, he's not the kind of ham actor who can pull off this sort of thing. He doesn't have a set of amusing, actorly mannerisms he can use to caricature the role he's playing; he simply puts a scowl on his face and just keeps it there, and we're left wondering whether we're supposed to take him seriously. He finally tips us off during his outrageous demise: after being swallowed by the snake, his character is unceremoniously regurgitated at the feet of Jennifer Lopez; before slumping over dead, he gives a wink. It's a moment more worthy of a Troma film than something from a major studio, but it is a funny punchline to the memorably gross-out



Walter Conti's mechanical snake rears its head convincingly in *ANACONDA*; unfortunately, most of the action is achieved with cartoony CGI effects.

imagery. Had the whole film been like this, we might have had a camp classic, instead of a sub-par spin-off of *THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON*.  
● Steve Biodrowski

### CATS DON'T DANCE

Director: Mark Dindal. Writers: Cliff Ruby & Elana Lesser and Roberts Gannaway. Warners, 3/97. 75 mins. G. Voices: Scott Bakula, Jasmine Guy, Kathy Najimy, John Rhys-Davies, George Kennedy, Rene Auberjonois, Hal Holbrook, Don Knotts, Natalie Cole.

*CATS DON'T DANCE* may begin like a million other films, animated or not (small town boy/cat comes to Hollywood with dreams of making it big), but the film's style and wit come together to create something more. With an art deco look that carries over to the character design, the film announces from its earliest moments that it is not going to be just another Disney wannabe. We're shown Hollywood's golden age through a real rose-colored filter: Graumann's Chinese Theater, the Crossroads of the World, even cartoon versions of the era's biggest stars—all appear in their shimmering glory. There's even a job at the film industry's old studio system, with Mammoth Pictures, where Danny, the cat from Kokomo, goes to find fame and fortune: the head of the studio is L.B. Mammoth, an obvious tip of the hat to Mr. Mayer. Within the story, the film both celebrates and sends up the cornball Hollywood musicals of yesteryear. Randy Newman's catchy songs seem to border on parody, while the choreography, by the late Gene Kelly, beautifully utilizes the dancers' smooth movement.

Director Mark Dindal plays with this tone very well, never letting it become too outlandish. A former effects animator at Disney, he also has a knack for crafting big set pieces, of which there are plenty: A tidal wave that destroys the studio, a chase high atop a huge hot air balloon hovering over the Chinese Theater, and a splashy musical finale, are wonderful excuses for showing off the film's slick and fluid animation. One of the most amazing animated feats is that, although the characters are designed as purely stylized caricatures, each one emerges as a distinct personality. This is especially true of the film's villain, Darla Dimple, a monstrously spoiled child star, and her bodyguard, the Frankenstein-monster-like Max, who carries out each of the brat's requests with a solemn "Yesss, Miss Dimple." Darla revels in her selfish nastiness, in the same vein as many of animation's worst

villains, making her so bad you've just gotta love her.

The film's only major flaw is that the style does sometimes work against itself. The filmmakers seem to have this incredible need to keep the film in perpetual motion. Some of the action on screen moves by at an almost subliminal pace, with characters constantly flailing their hands and carrying out distracting bits of business, even during the quietest moments. It's as if *CATS DON'T DANCE* is, quite literally, knocking itself out to be liked.

On the same bill is *PULLET SURPRISE*. Whereas *CATS DON'T DANCE* may try too hard to entertain, this tedious short subject doesn't try at all. A vehicle for the blowhard, behemoth rooster, Foghorn Leghorn, the cartoon's brief length seems almost interminable, with tired gags and uninspired animation that only makes one yearn for the classic Looney Tunes of yore. But don't let this disappointment prevent you from enjoying the main feature.  
●●● Mike Lyons

### THE SIXTH MAN

Director: Randal Miller. Writers: Christopher Reed & Cynthia Carle. Touchstone, 3/97. 107 mins. PG-13. With: Marlon Wayans, Kadeem Hardison, Kevin Dunn, Michael Michele, David Paymer.

What is it with basketball and fantasy films these days? Within the last twelve months we've seen *KAZAAM*, *SPACE JAM*, *DOUBLE TEAM*, and *THE SIXTH MAN*—all of them either about basketball or with basketball players in the leads. In this case the premise is that Antoine (Hardison) is on his way to taking his team to the NCAA Championship when he is felled by a heart attack. His younger brother Kenny (Wayans), having always lived in his brother's shadow, is unable to take up the slack, and the team falls into a slump—until Kenny's heartfelt pleas bring his brother back from the other side. Antoine then becomes the "Sixth Man" of the title, his invisible presence taking the team to victory.

Much humor is derived from the impossible stunts and CGI effects that occur during the games, while Kenny's off-court interaction with his ghostly brother makes him appear to be carrying on conversations, arguments, and even fights with himself (Wayans proves to be a gifted physical comedian in these scenes). Unfortunately, death has made apparent what was only suggested during his life: Antoine is an obnoxious jerk; the team and especially Kenny would be better off without him. Eventually, Antoine's behavior goes beyond annoying to outright malicious: he prevents an opponent from scoring by slamming the poor sap into the backboard so hard that he winds up in the hospital with a broken collarbone. For this transgression, the only penance Antoine ever serves is to state, rather lamely, that it was just an "accident." (Am I wrong—or just a little too Catholic—in thinking that maybe a little time in Purgatory was in order?)

The script does a poor job of delaying Kenny's inevitable break with Antoine, and the result is that we have plenty of time to ponder whether having a supernatural advantage is any less unfair than taking some performance-enhancing drug. The characters do get around to wrestling with this ethical question, though rather perfunctorily, and the film finesses the issue by having the team play the final championship game on their own (rather like *ANGELS IN THE OUTFIELD*). The ultimate message is that Kenny and his team had the talent to win, but Antoine was always stealing the glory. It's an adequate resolution to the story, but Antoine's behavior makes it difficult to believe that Kenny and his teammates took so long to realize it.  
● 1/2 Steve Biodrowski



## THE BORDERLAND: "The Saint," "Liar, Liar"

By Anthony P. Montesano

Wish-fulfillment has long been a staple of the fantasy genre. From *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* ("I wish I had never been born") to *BIG* ("I wish I was older") to the latest entry in the genre, *LIAR, LIAR* ("I wish my Dad would tell the truth for one day"), each of these films has at its core the same message: life requires perspective and balance. "You can appreciate your worth by seeing what the world would be like without you," argues *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE*. "You can appreciate your childhood if you're forced to grow up overnight," states *BIG*. And, "you can understand how lying hurts those around you when you're forced to tell the truth," is the message of *LIAR, LIAR* (Universal, 3/97; 87 mins; PG-13).

But the film, directed by Tom Shadyac and written by Paul Guay and Stephen Mazur, is not a heavy message movie; it's a Jim Carrey comedy—the best of his career. The reason is plain: Carrey finally plays an approachable guy. The characters he introduced on TV's *IN LIVING COLOR* (e.g., his masochistic, burn-scarred Fire Marshall Bob) were all tinged with a mean or bizarre spirit; his film characterizations to date (*THE CABLE GUY*, The Riddler in *BATMAN FOREVER*, and *THE MASK*) have all shared the same heritage. It's ironic that Carrey has often been compared to Jerry Lewis, because before *LIAR, LIAR* that comparison was unfair, based only on the fact that both comedians practice a particularly rubbery form of physical comedy. However, while Lewis' career is filled with characters for whom we want to cheer, characters who long for love, Carrey has essayed no such persona—until now.

Carrey's ability to instantaneously transform his face and body serves him well here in expressing pathos and epiphanies of his lying lawyer character. When he utters lines like "I'm a bad father," you can really feel the weight of the moment and the sincerity of the statement. When he joyfully exclaims repeatedly "I love my son!" the moment is tantamount to Jimmy Stewart's discovery of Zuzu's petals in his pant pocket. "There they are, Burt! Whadda ya know about that! Merry Christmas!" Both are the joyous shouts of souls who have discovered that life has given them a second chance.

**THE SAINT** (Paramount, 4/97, 116 mins, PG-13), starring Val (former Batman) Kilmer and Elisabeth Shue is an enjoyable throwback to a simpler time, and reminds one of 1930s radio adventures which encouraged kids around the country to save their cereal boxtops and send away for a secret decoder ring. A '90s-style decoder ring and other cool gadgets abound in this movie, which is one part James Bond tossed in with a touch of *MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE*, and a pinch of *THE SHADOW*.

As super-thief and master disguise artist Simon Templar, Kilmer offers a heaping mound of bravado peppered with sly humor. As a world-famous scientist with a heart condition on the verge of the discovery of "Cold Fusion"—the energy process that will change the world—Shue is at first literally breathless (she sounds like she needs asthma medicine) and sweetly innocent (in a Frank Capra/screwball comedy sort of way). The plot, written by Jonathan Hensleigh and Wesley Strick and aptly directed by Philp Noyce, contains many of the elements that make this type of film work: An aspiring Russian politico (the bad guy) hires Templar (the thief with a heart) to seal the "secret formula" for Cold Fusion, but Templar ends up falling in love with the beautiful scientist and his mission becomes a bit more...complicated. As the film briskly moves along, Kilmer slips into a number of disguises and personae (from the debonair to the absurdly comical—think Jerry Lewis in *THE NUTTY*



Lying lawyer Fletcher Reede (Jim Carrey) disappoints his son (Justin Cooper), whose birthday wish then magically forces Fletcher to tell the truth for a day, in *LIAR, LIAR*.

*PROFESSOR*), each named for a different Catholic saint. When his "saint" code is discovered (which it is, early in the proceedings), Templar is easier to find than sushi in a Japanese restaurant. The one regrettable aspect of the film is a prologue in which we discover Simon was raised in a Catholic orphanage run by sadistic, heartless Brothers. This is yet another in a long line of examples of needless Catholic bashing on the big and small screen. □

## DIRECT-TO-VIDEO

### HONEY, WE SHRUNK OURSELVES

Director: Dean Cundey. Writers: Karcy Kirkpatrick and Nell Scovell & Joel Hodgson. Disney Home Video, 3/97. PG. With: Rick Moranis, Eve Gordon, Stuart Pankin.

With *ALADDIN AND THE KING OF THIEVES*, Disney took a leap forward with the direct-to-video movie—which, prior to that, was the place where second-rate stories went to die. The *ALADDIN* sequel proved there was room for innovation and creativity. *HONEY, WE SHRUNK OURSELVES*, their latest direct-to-video offering, seems to prove all of that wrong. The first two *HONEY* films had never really been more than special effects shows, a chance to show off and exploit what it's like when humans are extremely tiny or of Godzilla proportions. The films were, however, at least entertaining diversions. The new film can't even be taken on that level, as Professor Wayne Szalinski (Moranis, who deserve a lot better) and the other adult members of his family are shrunk, and then spend the rest of the film wandering around their house, trying to find a way back to normal size, while their teenage children throw a party around them.

Cinematographer Dean Cundey makes his directorial debut after a long string of effects-heavy films such as *JURASSIC PARK* and *THE FLINTSTONES*. His penchant for such visuals is evident in many sequences, such as a ride on a Hot Wheels track, a flight inside a bubble, and an escape from a giant, CGI cockroach. This is the extent of the film's excitement, as other numerous scenes pass with flat dialogue and forced humor. It's almost as if the characters are just standing around waiting for the film to end.

The film will no doubt entertain its intended, indiscriminate younger audience, but other viewers will have to endure another unfortunate casualty of the direct-to-video dumping grounds. ● Mike Lyons

## MADE-FOR-TELEVISION

### THE HUNCHBACK

Director: Peter Medak. Writer: John Fasano. Turner Network, 3/97. 120 mins, with commercials. With: Mandy Patinkin, Richard Harris, Salma Hayek.

A problem with creating a new film version of something as well known as Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is that the story is so, well, known. The story of the tragic Quasimodo, the beautiful Esmeralda, and the tormented Frolo has been told and retold since pictures could move, most recently animation. So the first question has to be: why another one?

This most recent television adaptation was beautifully filmed, with stunning location work and production design. Following in the footsteps of such legends as Lon Chaney and Charles Laughton is the equally excellent Mandy Patinkin. It is to Laughton's moving performance in the 1939 film that Patinkin has admitted paying tribute, and it is a lovely gesture in a heart-wrenching portrayal. The ravishing Salma Hayek is a fine Esmeralda, whose beauty causes a man of God to fall, a loveless freak to love, and an entire downtrodden population to rise up in revolt. And Richard Harris is nearly a perfect Frolo, with his shaven head and weathered features, although maybe a bit restrained in a role that calls for pulling out all the stops and being as overbearing one moment as he can be fragile the next.

Peter Medak's direction shows a good eye with the camera and the appreciation of setting that is so crucial to a period piece. If it is a little problematic to have an entire band of cockney-sounding gypsies in 15th-century Paris, the performances are so earnest that this can be forgiven for the sake of the sheer timeless power of the material. When Medak's film does falter, it is through no fault of his, but merely because of familiarity. Since we do know the story so well, we anticipate the classic moments: Quasimodo's whipping and Esmeralda's kindness, the Hunchback's rescue of the gypsy from the hangman's noose to give her sanctuary. With two versions of the same story in less than a year, this production being the more faithful of the two (for all that matters), it may be time to let the old boy rest on his laurels. After uncounted cinematic whippings, beatings, and over 100 years of alienation on film, video and in print, it's the least he deserves. ●●● Frederick C. Szebin

### TWENTY THOUSAND LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA

Director: Michael Anderson. Writer: Joe Wiesenfeld. CBS-TV, 3/97. 120 mins, with commercials. With: Ben Cross, Richard Crenna, Paul Gross, Julie Cox.

In this CBS/Hallmark production, beautiful underwater photography and impressive special effects dress up a tired reworking of Jules Verne's adventure story, replacing Aronnax (Crenna)'s manservant with his progressive daughter, Sophie (Cox). This serves to make the first half of the two-hour film a mere love triangle tale as Nemo (Cross) vies for her affections with harpoonist Ned Land (Gross). The second half of the film picks up a bit as Nemo takes on a war ship out to sink him and a CGI-created proto-leviathan out to eat him, but even these scenes lack the dramatic tension and sense of wonder necessary to pull them off to their fullest degrees.

Ben Cross offers a more tragic Nemo than has been seen before, not as domineering and dictatorial as Verne's creation, nor as imposing as James Mason's portrayal. Cross's Nemo is a lonely figure, out to destroy those who took his kingdom from him. But his softer side is seen with Sophie, whom he wants to make queen of his undersea world. This is all well and good, but Anderson, for all his years as a feature and TV director, just can't make the most out of the material. What we're left with is simply serviceable—an awkward love story tied in to a pallid adventure story. ●● Frederick C. Szebin



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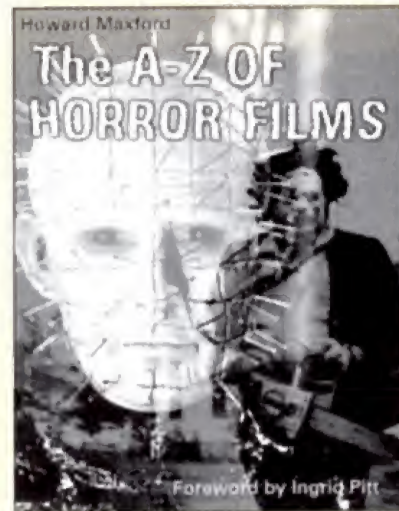
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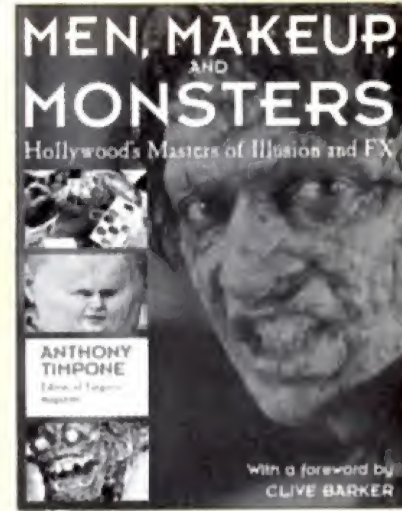
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## GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE

continued from page 10

And then there's the issue of speech."

The producers loosened their requirements to accommodate the story's constraints. "In the early version, the script required a lot of physical activities from the gorillas, climbing trees, swinging on vines, and walking on logs," Holt recalled. Since CGI and other alternatives couldn't provide a realistic gorilla, the decision was made to adapt the gorilla costumes to oblige the script.

"The true physiology of a gorilla is that its head should be projecting out and forward from the human body about 30 degrees in front of the actor's head. We decided to warp the design somewhat, bringing the head back into a position on the human body that permitted the performers to use their own eyes, and do their own stunts." As the script developed, however, many of the stunts were dropped and George's relationship to Ape became much more verbal.

Casting the gorillas presented another set of unique challenges. Since George and Ape were often photographed together, Ape had to

approximate Fraser's height. Real gorillas stand around five feet tall, and performers often used by effects gurus like Rick Baker and Stan Winston were too short to be cast. The script also required an element of comic timing not usually asked of gorilla performers. Taller actors familiar with the rhythms of physical comedy were cast, with Nameer Kadi (QUEST FOR FIRE, CONGO) heading the ensemble.

The Henson shop was also responsible for creating the lion double that squares off with George in a WWF-style wrestling match. The plan called for a real lion to stand upright and wrestle his trainer. "It immediately became apparent that a 550-pound lion leaping on a man takes him down like a flash," Holt said. "There was absolutely no question of anyone holding the lion in that pose for any meaningful length of time to establish the shot."

The scene was restaged with the trainer wrestling the lion on the ground, but the puppet double had been fashioned as a waist-up, bipedal version of the lion, to be carried into battle by a puppeteer. Since the puppet wasn't built for grappling on the ground, the crew improvised, removing the head.

The puppeteer then wrestled Fraser by rolling on the ground without the head, with the lion puppet's removable mane thrown over him as camouflage.

"I'm told it intercut so well they couldn't tell where the real lion ended and the puppet lion began," said Holt. "Ultimately, what we're trying to do is to make the scene a success, not necessarily perform a *tour de force* of puppetry or animatronics."

Although the film was a triumph for the Henson crew, there were a few setbacks. After crafting three different versions of a snake for a wrestling gag, the creative team decided that the gimmick simply didn't photograph well, so the snake was reduced to a quick sight gag.

Another late revision was George's faithful friend, the Tookie Tookie bird. After several months of designing a make-believe bird, the Henson team was informed that the Tookie Tookie would be a toucan. The live bird proved almost impossible to replicate; fortunately, the avian actors put on a bravura performance, rendering their mechanical counterparts obsolete.

When asked his opinion of the film's drawing card, designer

Marsh responded, "It's a very funny movie. It's got a lot of physical gags in it, a lot of trickery, and also a lot of breadth . . . I think it's going to be an amazing film, and it's going to do very well. I'm proud of it." □

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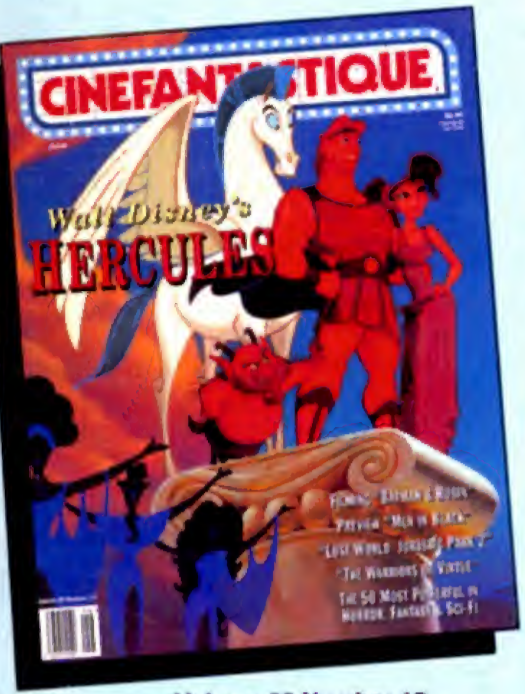
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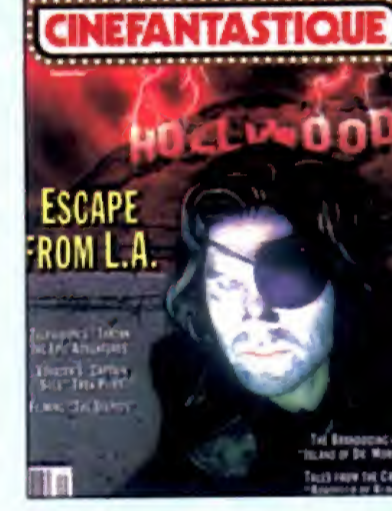
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